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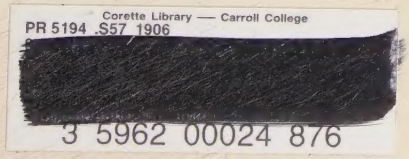
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Sir John Constantine

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SIR JOHN CONSTANTINE

Memoirs of His Adventures at Home and Abroad, and particularly in the Island of Corsica; beginning with the Year 1756; written by his son, Prosper Paleologus, otherwise Constantine

EDITED BY

Q

(A. T. QUILLER-COUCH)

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Sir John Constantine

SIR JOHN CONSTANTINE

CHAPTER I

OF THE LINEAGE AND CONDITION OF SIR JOHN CONSTANTINE

I have laboured to make a covenant with myself, that affection may not press upon judgment: for I suppose there is no man, that hath any apprehension of gentry or nobleness, but his affection stands to a continuance of a noble name and house, and would take hold of a twig or twine-thread to uphold it: and yet Time hath his revolution, there must be a period and an end of all temporal things, *finis rerum*, an end of names and dignities and whatsoever is terrene. . . . For where is Bohun? Where is Mowbray? Where is Mortimer? Nay, which is more and most of all, where is Plantagenet? They are entombed in the urns and sepulchres of mortality.—*Lord Chief Justice Crew.*

My father, Sir John Constantine of Constantine, in the county of Cornwall, was a gentleman of ample but impoverished estates, who by renouncing the world had come to be pretty generally reputed a madman. This did not affect him one jot, since he held precisely the same opinion of his neighbours—with whom, moreover, he continued on excellent terms. He kept six saddle horses in a stable large enough for

a regiment of cavalry; a brace of setters and an infirm spaniel in kennels which had sometime held twenty couples of hounds; and himself and his household in a wing of his great mansion, locking off the rest, with its portraits and tapestries, cases of books, and stands of antique arms, to be a barrack for the mice. This household consisted of his brother-in-law, Gervase (a bachelor of punctual habits but a rambling head); a butler, Billy Priske; a cook, Mrs. Nance, who also looked after the housekeeping; two serving-maids; and, during his holidays, the present writer. My mother (an Arundel of Trerice) had died within a year after giving me birth; and after a childhood which lacked playmates, indeed, but was by no means neglected or unhappy, my father took me to Winchester College, his old school, to be improved in those classical studies which I had hitherto followed desultorily under our vicar, Mr. Grylls, and there entered me as a Commoner in the house of Dr. Burton, Head-master. I had spent almost four years at Winchester at the date (Midsummer, 1756) when this story begins.

To return to my father. He was, as the world goes, a mass of contrarieties. A thorough Englishman in the virtues for which foreigners admire us, and in the extravagance at which they smile, he had never even affected an interest in the politics over

which Englishmen grow red in the face; and this in his youth had commended him to Walpole, who had taken him up and advanced him as well for his abilities, address, and singularly fine presence as because his estate then seemed adequate to maintain him in any preferment. Again Walpole's policy abroad—which really treated warfare as the evil it appears in other men's professions—condemned my father, a born soldier, to seek his line in diplomacy; wherein he had no sooner built a reputation by services at two or three of the Italian courts than, with a knighthood in hand and an ambassadorship in prospect, he suddenly abandoned all, cast off the world and retired into Cornwall, to make a humdrum marriage and practise fishing for trout.

The reason of it none knew, or how his estate had come to be impoverished, as beyond doubt it was. Here again he showed himself unlike the rest of men, in that he let the stress of poverty fall first upon himself, next upon his household, last of all upon his tenants and other dependants. After my mother's death he cut down his own charges (the cellar only excepted) to the last penny, shut himself off in a couple of rooms, slept in a camp bed, wore an old velveteen coat in winter and in summer a fisherman's smock, ate frugally, and would have drunk beer or even water had not his stomach abhorred them both. Of

wine he drank in moderation—that is to say, for him, since his temperance would have sent nine men out of ten under the table—and of the best. He had indeed a large and obstinate dignity in his drinking. It betrayed, even as his carriage betrayed beneath his old coat, a king in exile.

Yet while he pinched himself with these economies, he drew no strings—or drew them tenderly—upon the expenses and charities of a good landlord. The fences rotted around his own park and pleasure grounds, but his tenants' fences, walls, roofs stood in more than moderate repair, nor (although my uncle Gervase groaned over the accounts) would an abatement of rent be denied, the appeal having been weighed and found to be reasonable. The rain—which falls alike upon the just and the unjust—beat through his own roof, but never through the labourer's thatch; and Mrs. Nance, the cook, who hated beggars, might not without art and secrecy dismiss a single beggar unfed. His religion he told to no man, but believed the practice of worship to be good for all men, and regularly encouraged it by attending church on Sundays and festivals. He and the vicar ruled our parish together in amity as fellow-Christians and rival anglers.

Now all these apparent contrarieties in my father flowed in fact from a very rare simplicity, and this

simplicity again had its origin in his lineage, which was something more than royal.

On the Cornish shore of the Tamar River, which divides Cornwall from Devon, and a little above Saltash, stands the country church of Landulph, so close by the water that the high tides wash by its graveyard wall. Within the church you will find a mural tablet of brass thus inscribed:

> Here lyeth the body of Theodoro Paleologvs
> of Pesaro in Italye, descended from y^e^ Imperyall
> lyne of y^e^ last Christian Emperors of Greece
> being the sonne of Camilio y^e^ sone of Prosper
> the sonne of Theodoro the sonne of John y^e^
> sonne of Thomas second brother to Constantine
> Paleologvs, the 8th of that name and last of y^t^ lyne y^t^
> raygned in Constantinople vntill svb-
> dewed by the Tvrks who married with Mary
> y^e^ davghter of William Balls of Hadlye in
> Svffolke gent & had issve 5 children Theo-
> doro John Ferdinando Maria & Dorothy & de-
> p'ted this life at Clyfton y^e^ 21th of Ianvary 1636

Above these words the tablet bears an eagle engraved with two heads, and its talons resting upon two gates (of Rome and Constantinople), with a crescent for difference between the gates, and over all an imperial crown. In truth this exile buried by Tamar drew his blood direct from the loins of the great Byzantine emperors, through that Thomas of whom Mahomet II. said " I have found many slaves

in Peloponnesus, but this man only": and from Theodore, through his second son John, came the Constantines of Constantine—albeit with a bar sinister, of which my father made small account. I believe he held privately that a Constantine, *de stirpe imperatorum*, had no call to concern himself with petty ceremonies of this or that of the Church's offshoots to legitimise his blood. At any rate no bar sinister appeared on the imperial escutcheon repeated, with quarterings of Arundel, Mohun, Grenville, Nevile, Archdeckne, Courtney, and, again, Arundel, on the wainscots and in the windows of Constantine, usually with the legend *Dabit Devs His Qvoqve Finem*, but twice or thrice with a hopefuller one, *Generis Revocemus Honores.*

Knowing him to be thus descended, you could recognise in all my father said or did a large simplicity as of the earlier gods, and a dignity proper to a king as to a beggar, but to no third and mean state. A child might beard him, but no man might venture a liberty with him or abide the rare explosions of his anger. You might even, upon long acquaintance, take him for a great, though mad, Englishman, and trust him as an Englishman to the end; but the soil of his nature was that which grows the vine—volcanic, breathing through its pores a hidden heat to answer the sun's. Whether or no there be in man a

faith to remove mountains, there is in him (and it may come to the same thing) a fire to split them, and anon to clothe the bare rock with tendrils and soft-scented blooms.

In person my father stood six feet five inches tall, and his shoulders filled a doorway. His head was large and shapely, and he carried it with a very noble poise; his face a fine oval, broad across the brow and ending in a chin at once delicate and masterful; his nose slightly aquiline; his hair—and he wore his own, tied with a ribbon—of a shining white. His cheeks were hollow and would have been cadaverous but for their hue, a sanguine brown, well tanned by out-of-door living. His eyes, of an iron-grey colour, were fierce or gentle as you took him, but as a rule extraordinarily gentle. He would walk you thirty miles any day without fatigue, and shoot you a woodcock against any man; but as an angler my uncle Gervase beat him.

He spoke Italian as readily as English; French and the modern Greek with a little more difficulty; and could read in Greek, Latin, and Spanish. His books were the "Meditations" of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and Dante's "Divine Comedy," with the "Æneis," Ariosto, and some old Spanish romances next in order. I do not think he cared greatly for any English writers but Donne and Izaak Walton,

of whose "Angler" and "Life of Sir Henry Wotton" he was inordinately fond. In particular he admired the character of this Sir Henry Wotton, singling him out among "the famous nations of the dead" (as Sir Thomas Browne calls them) for a kind of posthumous friendship—nay, almost a passion of memory. To be sure, though with more than a hundred years between them, both had been bred at Winchester, and both had known courts and embassies and retired from them upon entering private life. . . . But who can explain friendship, even after all the essays written upon it? Certainly to be friends with a dead man was to my father a feat neither impossible nor absurd.

Yet he possessed two dear living friends at least in my uncle Gervase and Mr. Grylls, and had even dedicated a temple to their friendship. It stood about half a mile away from the house, at the foot of the old deer park: a small Ionic summer-house set on a turfed slope facing down a dell upon the Helford River. A spring of water, very cold and pure, rose bubbling a few paces from the porch and tumbled down the dell with a pretty chatter. Tradition said that it had once been visited and blessed by St. Alban, for which cause my father called his summer-house by the saint's name, and annually on his festival (which falls on the 22nd of June) caused wine and

dessert to be carried out thither, where the three drank to their common pastime and discoursed of it in the cool of the evening within earshot of the lapsing water. On many other evenings they met to smoke their pipes here, my father and Mr. Grylls playing at chequers sometimes, while my uncle wrapped and bent, till the light failed him, new trout flies for the next day's sport; but to keep St. Alban's feast they never omitted, which my father commemorated with a tablet set against the back wall and bearing these lines:

> Peace to this house within this little wood,
> Named of S^{t} Alban and his brotherhood
> That here would meet and punctual on his day
> Their heads and hands and hearts together lay,
> Nor may no years the mem'ries thee untwine
> Of Grylls W. G.
> And Arundel G. A. } Anno 1752
> And Constantine J. C.
>
> Flvmina amem silvasqve inglorivs.

Of these two friends of my father I shall speak in their proper place, but have given up this first chapter to him alone. My readers maybe will grumble that it omits to tell what they would first choose to learn: the reason why he had exchanged fame and the world for a Cornish exile. But as yet he only—and perhaps my uncle Gervase, who kept the accounts—held the key to that secret.

CHAPTER II

I RIDE ON A PILGRIMAGE

Heus Rogere! fer caballos;
Eja, nunc eamus!

At Winchester, which we boys (though we fared hardly) never doubted to be the first school in the world, as it was the most ancient in England, we had a song we called *Domum*: and because our common pride in her—as the best pride will—belittled itself in speech, I trust that our song honoured St. Mary of Winton the more in that it celebrated only the joys of leaving her.

The tale went, it had been composed (in Latin, too) by a boy detained at school for a punishment during the summer holidays. Another fable improved on this by chaining him to a tree. A third imprisoned him in cloisters whence, through the arcades and from the ossuaries of dead scholars and fellows, he poured out his soul to the swallows haunting the green garth—

Jam repetit domum
Daulias advena,
Nosque domum repetamus.

Whatever its origin, our custom was to sing it as the holidays—especially the summer holidays—drew near, and to repeat it as they drew nearer, until every voice was hoarse. As I remember, we kept up this custom with no decrease of fervour through the heats of June, 1755, though they were such that our *hostiarius* Dr. Warton, then a new broom, swept us out of school and for a fortnight heard our books (as the old practice had been) in cloisters, where we sat upon cool stone and in the cool airs, and between our tasks watched the swallows at play. Nevertheless we panted, until evening released us to wander forth along the water-meadows by Itchen and bathe, and, having bathed, to lie naked amid the mints and grasses for a while before returning in the twilight.

This bathing went on, not in one or two great crowds, but in groups, and often in pairs only, scattered along the river-bank almost all the way to Hills; it being our custom again at Winchester (and I believe it still continues) to *socius* or walk with one companion; and only at one or two favoured pools would several of these couples meet together for the sport. On the evening of which I am to tell, my companion was a boy named Fiennes, of about my own age, and we bathed alone, though not far away to right and left the bank teemed with outcries and

laughter and naked boys running all silvery as their voices in the dusk.

With all this uproar the trout of Itchen, as you may suppose, had gone into hiding, but doubtless some fine fellows lay snug under the stones, and—the stream running shallow after the heats—as we stretched ourselves on the grass Fiennes challenged me to tickle for one; it may be because he had heard me boast of my angling feats at home. There seemed a likely pool under the farther bank; convenient, except that to take up the best position beside it I must get the level sun full in my face. I crept across, however, Fiennes keeping silence, laid myself flat on my belly, and peered down into the pool, shading my eyes with my hand. For a long while I saw no fish, until the sun rays, striking aslant, touched the edge of a golden fin very prettily bestowed in a hole of the bank and well within an overlap of green weed. Now and again the fin quivered, but for the most part my gentleman lay quiet as a stone, head to stream, and waited for relief from these noisy Wykehamists. Experience perhaps had taught him to despise them: at any rate, when gently—very gently—I lowered my hand and began to tickle, he showed neither alarm nor resentment.

"Is it a trout?" demanded Fiennes in an excited whisper from the farther shore. But of course I made

no answer, and presently I supposed that he must have crept off to his clothes, for some way up the stream I heard the Second Master's voice warning the bathers to dress and return, and with his usual formula, "*Ite domum saturæ, venit Hesperus, ite capellæ.*" Being short-sighted, he missed to spy me, and I felt, rather than saw or heard, him pass on; for with one hand I yet shaded my eyes while with the other I tickled.

Yet another two minutes went by, and then with a jerk I had my trout, my thumb and forefinger deep under his gills; brought down my other clutch upon him and, lifting, flung him back over my head among the meadow grass, my posture being such that I could neither hold him struggling nor recover my own balance save by rolling sideways over on my shoulder-pin; which I did, and, running to him where he gleamed and doubled, flipping the grasses, caught him in both hands and held him aloft.

But other voices than Fiennes' answered my shout over the river—voices that I knew, though they belonged not to this hour or this place; and, blinking against the sun, now shining level across Lavender Meads, I was aware of two tall figures standing dark against it, and of a third and shorter one between whose legs it poured in gold as through a natural

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arch. Sure no second man in England wore Billy Priske's legs!

Then, and while I stood amazed, my father's voice and my uncle Gervase's called to me together; and, gulping down all wonder, possessed with love only and a wild joy—but yet grasping my fish—I splashed across the shallows and up the bank, and let my father take me naked to his heart.

"So, lad," said he after a moment, thrusting me a little back by the shoulders (while I could only sob), and holding me so that the sun fell full on me, "dost truly love me so much?"

"Clivver boy, clivver boy!" said the voice of Billy Priske. "Lord, now, what things they do teach here beside the Latin!"

The rogue said it, as I knew, to turn my father's suspicion, having himself taught me the poacher's trick. But my uncle Gervase, whose mind moved as slowly as it was easily diverted, answered with gravity:

"It is hard knowing what may or may not be useful in after life, seeing that God in His wisdom hides what that life is to be."

"Very true," agreed my father, with a twinkle, and took snuff.

"But—but what brings you here?" cried I, with a catch of the breath, ignoring all this.

"Nevertheless, such comely lads as they be," my uncle continued, "God will doubtless bring them to good. Comelier lads, brother, I never saw, nor, I think, the sun never shined on; yet there was one, at the bowls yonder, was swearing so it grieved me to the heart."

"Put on your clothes, boy," said my father, answering me. "We have ridden far, but we bring no ill news; and to-morrow—I have the Head-master's leave for it—you ride on with us to London."

"To London!" My heart gave another great leap, as every boy's must on hearing that he is to see London for the first time. But here we all turned at a cry from Billy Priske, between whose planted ankles Master Fiennes had mischievously crept and was measuring the span between with extended thumb and little finger. My father stooped, haled him to his feet by the collar, and demanded what he did.

"Why, sir, 'he's a Colossus'!" quoted that nimble youth;

"'and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peer about——'"

"'And will find yourself a dishonourable grave,'" my father capped him. "What's your name, boy?"

"Fiennes, sir; Nathaniel Fiennes." The lad saluted.

My father lifted his hat in answer. "Founder's kin?"

"I am here on that condition, sir."

"Then you are kinsman, as well as namesake, of him who saved our Wykeham's tomb in the Parliament troubles. I felicitate you, sir, and retract my words, for by that action of your kinsman's shall the graves of all his race and name be honoured."

Young Fiennes bowed. "Compliments fly, sir, when gentlemen meet. But"—and he glanced over his shoulder and rubbed the small of his back expressively—"as a Wykehamist, you will not have me late at names-calling."

"Go, boy, and answer to yours; they can call no better one." My father dipped a hand in his pocket. "I may not invite you to breakfast with us tomorrow, for we start early; and you will excuse me if I sin against custom—it was esteemed a laudable practice in my time." A gold coin passed.

"*Et in sæcula sæculo—o—rum. Amen!*" Master Fiennes spun the coin, pocketed it, and went off whistling schoolwards over the meads.

My father linked his arm in mine and we followed, I asking, and the three of them answering, a hundred questions of home. But why, or on what business, we were riding to London on the morrow my father would not tell. "Nay, lad," said he, "take your

Bible and read that Isaac asked no questions on the way to Mariah."

My uncle, who overheard this, considered it for a while, and said: "The difference is that you are not going to sacrifice Prosper."

The three were to lie that night at the Wheel Inn, where they had stabled their horses; and at the door of the Head-master's house, where we Commoners lodged, they took leave of me, my father commending me to God and good dreams. That they were happy ones I need not tell.

He was up and abroad early next morning, in time to attend chapel, where by the vigour of his responses he set the nearer boys tittering, two of whom I afterwards fought for it, though with what result I cannot remember. The service, which we urchins heeded little, left him pensive as we walked together towards the inn, and he paused once or twice, with eyes downcast on the cobbles, and muttered to himself.

"I am striving to recollect my Morning Lines, lad," he confessed at length, with a smile; "and thus, I think, they go. The great Sir Henry Wotton, you have heard me tell of, in the summer before his death made a journey hither to Winchester; and as he returned towards Eton he said to a friend that went with him: 'How useful was that advice of an old

monk that we should perform our devotions in a constant place, because we so meet again with the very thoughts which possessed us at our last being there!' And, as Walton tells, 'I find it,' he said, 'thus far experimentally true, that at my now being in that school and seeing that very place where I sat when I was a boy occasioned me to remember those very thoughts of my youth which then possessed me: sweet thoughts indeed'——"

Here my father paused. "Let me be careful, now. I should be perfect in the words, having read them more than a hundred times. 'Sweet thoughts indeed,' said he, 'that promised my growing years numerous pleasures, without mixture of cares; and those to be enjoyed when time—which I therefore thought slow-paced—had changed my youth into manhood. But age and experience have taught me these were but empty hopes, for I have always found it true, as my Saviour did foretell, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Nevertheless, I saw there a succession of boys using the same recreations, and, questionless, possessed with the same thoughts that then possessed me. Thus one generation succeeds another, both in their lives, recreations, hopes, fears, and death.'

"But I would not have you, lad," he went on, "to pay too much heed to these thoughts, which will come

to you in time, for as yet you are better without 'em. Nor were they my only thoughts: for having brought back my own sacrifice, which I had sometime hoped might be so great, but now saw to be so little, at that moment I looked down to your place in chapel and perceived that I had brought belike the best offering of all. So my hope—thank God!—sprang anew as I saw you there standing vigil by what bright armour you guessed not, nor in preparation for what high warfare." He laid a hand on my shoulder. "So your chapel to-day, child, has been the longer by a sermon. There, there! forget all but the tail on't."

We rode out of Winchester with a fine clatter, all four of us upon hired nags, the Cornish horses being left in the stables to rest; and, after crossing the Hog's Back, baited at Guildford. A thunderstorm in the night had cleared the weather, which, though fine, was cooler, with a brisk breeze playing on the uplands; and still as we went my spirits sang with the larks overhead, so blithe was it to be sitting in a saddle instead of at a scob, and riding to London between the blown scents of hedgerow and hayfield and branfield, all fragrant of liberty yet none of them more delicious to a boy than the mingled smell of leather and horseflesh. Billy Priske kept up a chatter beside me like a brook's. He had never till now

been outside of Cornwall but in a fishing-boat, and though he had come more than two hundred miles each new prospect was a marvel to him. My father told me that, once across the Tamar ferry, being told that he was now in Devonshire, he had sniffed and observed the air to be growing "fine and stuffy"; and again, near Holt Forest, where my father announced that we were crossing the border between Hampshire and Surrey, he drew rein and sat for a moment looking about him and scratching his head.

"The Lord's ways be past finding out," he murmured. "Not so much as a post!"

"Why *should* there be a post?" demanded my uncle.

"Why, sir, for the men of Hampshire and the men of Surrey to fight over and curse one another by on Ash Wednesdays. But where there's no landmark a plain man can't remove it, and where he can't remove it I don't see how he can be cursed for it."

"'Twould be a great inconvenience, as you say, Billy, if, for the sake of argument, the men of Hampshire wanted to curse the men of Surrey."

"They couldn't do it"—Billy shook his head—"for the sake of argument or any other sake; and therefore I say, though not one to dictate to the Lord,

that if a river can't be managed hereabouts—and, these two not being Devon and Cornwall, a whole river might be overdoing things—there ought to be some little matter of a trout-stream, or at the least a notice-board."

"The fellow's right," said my father. "Man would tire too soon of his natural vices; so we invent new ones for him by making laws and boundaries."

"Surely, and virtues too," suggested my uncle, as we rode forward again. "You will not deny that patriotism is a virtue?"

"Not I," said my father; "nor that it is the finest invention of all."

I remember the Hog's Back and the breeze blowing there because on the highest rise we came on a gibbet and rode around it to windward on the broad heathery margin of the road; and also because the sight put my father in mind of a story which he narrated on the way down to Guildford.

The Story of Our Lady of the Rosary

"It is told," began my father, "in a sermon of the famous Vieyras——"

"For what was he famous?" asked my uncle.

"For being a priest, and yet preaching so good a

sermon on love. It is told in it that in the kingdom of Valencia there lived an hidalgo, young and rich, who fell in love with a virtuous lady, ill treated by her husband: and she with him, howbeit without the least thought of evil. But, as evil suspects its like, so this husband doubted the fidelity which was his without his deserving, and laid a plot to be revenged. On the pretext of the summer heats he removed with his household to a country house; and there one day he entered a room where his wife sat alone, turned the key, and, drawing out a dagger, ordered her to write what he should dictate. She, being innocent, answered him that there was no need of daggers, but she would write, as her duty was, what he commanded: which was, a letter to the young hidalgo telling him that her husband had left home on business; that if her lover would come, she was ready to welcome him; and that, if he came secretly the next night, he would find the garden gate open, and a ladder placed against the window. This she wrote and signed, seeing no escape; and, going to her own room, commended her fears and her weakness to the Virgin.

"The young hidalgo, on receiving the letter (very cautiously delivered), could scarcely believe his bliss, but prepared, as you will guess, to embrace it. Having dressed himself with care, at the right hour he

mounted his horse and rode out towards his lady's house. Now he was a devout youth, as youths go, and on his way he remembered—which was no little thing on such an occasion—that since morning he had not said over his rosary as his custom was. So he began to tell it bead by bead, when a voice near at hand said, 'Halt, Cavalier!' He drew his sword and peered around him in the darkness, but could see no one, and was fumbling his rosary again when again the voice spoke, saying, 'Look up, Cavalier!' and, looking up, he beheld against the night a row of wayside gibbets, and rode in among them to discover who had called him. To his horror one of the malefactors hanging there spoke down to him, begging to be cut loose; 'and,' said the poor wretch, 'if you will light the heap of twigs at your feet and warm me by it your charity shall not be wasted.' For Christian charity then the youth, having his sword ready, cut him down, and the gallows knave fell on his feet and warmed himself at the lit fire. 'And now,' said he, being warmed, 'you must take me up behind your saddle; for there is a plot laid to-night from which only I can deliver you.' So they mounted and rode together to the house, where, having entered the garden by stealth, they found the ladder ready set. 'You must let me climb first,' said the knave; and had no sooner reached the ladder's top than two or three pistol shots

were fired upon him from the window and as many hands reached out and stabbed him through and through until he dropped into the ditch; whence, however, he sprang on his feet, and, catching our hidalgo by the arm, hurried him back through the garden to the gate where his horse stood tethered. Then they mounted and rode away into safety, the dead behind the living. 'All this is enchantment to me,' said the youth as they went. 'But I must thank you, my friend; for whether dead or alive—and to my thinking you must be doubly dead—you have rendered me a great service.' 'You may say a mass for me, and thank you,' the dead man answered; 'but for the service you must thank the Mother of God, who commanded me and gave me power to deliver you, and has charged me to tell you the reason of her kindness: which is, that every day you say her rosary.' 'I do thank her and bless her then,' replied the youth, 'and henceforth will I say her rosary not once daily but thrice, for that she hath preserved my life to-night.'"

"A very proper resolution," said my uncle.

"And I hope, sir, he kept it," chimed in Billy Priske; "good Protestant though I be."

"The story is not ended," said my father. "The dead man—they were dismounted now and close under the gallows—looked at the young man angrily

and said he, 'I doubt Our Lady's pains be wasted, after all. Is it possible, sir, you think she sent me to-night to save your life?' 'For what else?' inquired the youth. 'To save your soul, sir, and your lady's; both of which (though you guessed not or forgot it) stood in jeopardy just now, so that the gate open to you was indeed the gate of Hell. Pray hang me back as you found me,' he concluded, 'and go your ways for a fool.'

"Now see what happened. The murderers in the house, coming down to bury the body and finding it not, understood that the young man had not come alone; from which they reasoned that his servants had carried him off and would publish the crime. They therefore, with their master, hurriedly fled out of the country. The lady betook herself to a religious house, where in solitude questioning herself she found that in will, albeit not in act, she had been less than faithful. As for the hidalgo, he rode home and shut himself within doors, whence he came forth in a few hours as a man from a sepulchre—which, indeed, to his enemies he evidently was when they heard that he was abroad and unhurt whom they had certainly stabbed to death; and to his friends almost as great a marvel when they perceived the alteration of his life; and to himself the greatest of all, who alone knew what had passed, and that, as by enchantment

his life had taken this turn, so he spent its remainder like a man enchanted rather than converted. I am told," my father concluded, " though the sermon says nothing about it, that he and the lady came in the end, and as by an accident, to be buried side by side, at a little distance, in the Chapel of Our Lady of Succour in the cathedral church of Valencia, and there lie stretched—two parallels of dust—to meet only at the Resurrection when the desires of all dust shall be purged away."

With this story my father beguiled the road down into Guildford, and of his three listeners I was then the least attentive. Years afterwards, as you shall learn, I had reason to remember it.

At Guildford, where we fed ourselves and our horses and rested them for an hour, I took Billy aside and questioned him (forgetting the example of Isaac) why we were going to London and on what business. He shook his head.

" Squire knows," said he. " As for me, a still tongue keeps a wise head, and moreover I know not. Bain't it enough for 'ee to be quit of school and drinking good ale in the kingdom o' Guildford? Very well, then."

" Still, one cannot help wondering," said I, half to myself; but Billy took me up.

" The last friend a man should want to take up

with is his Future," said he, sagely. "I knows naught about en but what's to his discredit—as that I shall die sooner or later, a thing that goes against my stomach; or that at the best I shall grow old, which runs counter to my will. He's that uncomfortable, too, you can't please him. Take him hopeful, and you're counting your chickens; take him doleful, and foreboding is worse than witchcraft. There was a Mevagissey man I sailed with as a boy —and your father's tale just now put me in mind of him—paid half-a-crown to a conjurer, one time, to have his fortune told; which was, that he would marry the ugliest maid in the parish. Whereby it preyed on his mind till he hanged hisself. Whereby along comes the woman in the nick o' time, cuts him down, an' marries him out o' pity while he's too weak to resist. That's your Future; and, as I say, I keeps en at arm's length."

With this philosophy of Billy I had to be content and find my own guesses at the mystery. But as the afternoon wore on I kept no hold on any speculation for more than a few minutes. I was saddle-weary, drowsed with sunburn and the moving landscape over which the sun, when I turned, swam in a haze of dust. The villages crowded closer, and at the entry of each I thought London was come, but anon the houses thinned and dwindled and we were between hedge-

rows again. So it lasted, village after village, until with the shut of night, when the long shadows of our horses before us melted into dusk, a faint glow opened on the sky ahead and grew and brightened. I knew it: but even as I saluted it my chin dropped forward and I dozed. In a dream I rode through the lighted streets, and at the door of our lodgings my father lifted me down from the saddle.

CHAPTER III

I ACQUIRE A KINGDOM

Gloucester. The trick of that voice I do well remember:
Is't not the king?
Lear. Ay, every inch a king.—*King Lear.*

Surely he hath ruled enough;
Mark the leather of his gauntlet, how the worms are in the stuff.
The Two Old Kings.

From our lodgings, which were in Bond Street, we sallied forth next morning to view the town; my father leading us first by way of St. James's and across the Park to the Abbey, and on the way holding discourse to which I recalled myself with difficulty from London's shows and wonders—his Majesty's tall guards at the palace gates, the gorgeous promenaders in the Mall, the swans and wild fowl on the lake. "I wish you to remark, my dear child," said he, "that between a capital and solitude there is no third choice; nor, I would add, can a mind extract the best of solitude unless it bring urbanity to the wilderness. Your rustic is no philosopher, and your provincial townsman is the devil: if you would meditate in Arden, your company must be the Duke,

Jaques, Touchstone—courtiers all—or, again, Rosalind, the Duke's daughter, if you would catch the very mood of the forest. I tell you this, child, that you may not be misled by my example (which has a reason of its own and, I trust, an excuse) into shunning your destiny though it lead and keep you in cities and among crowds; for we have it on the word of no less busy a man than the Emperor Marcus Aurelius that to seek out private retiring-rooms for the soul such as country villages, the sea-shore, mountains, is but a mistaken simplicity, seeing that at what time soever a man will it is in his power to retire into himself and be at rest, dwelling within the walls of a city as in a shepherd's fold of the mountain. So also the sainted Juan du Avila tells us that a man who trusts in God may, if he take pains, recollect God in streets and public places better than will a hermit in his cell; and the excellent Archbishop of Cambrai, writing to the Countess of Gramont, counselled her to practise recollection and give a quiet thought to God at dinner times in a lull of the conversation, or, again, when she was driving or dressing or having her hair arranged; these hindrances (said he) profited more than any *engoument* of devotion.

"But," he went on, "to bear yourself rightly in a crowd you must study how one crowd differs from

another, and how in one city you may have that great orderly movement of life (whether of business or of pleasure) which is the surrounding joy of princes in their palaces, and an insensate mob, which is the most brutal and at the same time the vilest aspect of man. For as in a thronged street you may learn the high meaning of citizenship, so in a mob you may unlearn all that makes a man dignified. Yet even the mob you should study in a capital, as Shakespeare did in his "Julius Cæsar" and his "Coriolanus"; for only so can you know it in its quiddity. I conjure you, child, to get your sense of men from their capital cities."

He had something to tell of almost every great house we passed. He seemed—he that had saluted no one as we crossed the Mall, saluted of none—to walk this quarter of London with a proprietary tread; and by and by, coming to the river, he waved an arm and broke into panegyric.

"Other capitals have had their turn and others will overtake and outstrip her; but where is one in these times to compare with London? Where in Europe will you see streets so well ordered, squares so spacious, houses so comfortable, yet elegant, as in this mile east and south of Hyde Park? Where such solid, self-respecting wealth as in our City? Where such merchant-princes, such merchant-adventurers as

they of whom Whittington struck the note? Where half its commerce? and where a commerce touched with one tithe of its imagination? Where such a river, for trade as for pageants? On what other shore two buildings side by side so famous, the one for just laws, civil security, liberty with obedience, the other for heroic virtues resumed, with their propagating dust, into the faith which sowed all and, having reaped, renews?"

In the Abbey—where my uncle Gervase was forced to withdraw behind a pillar and rub Billy Priske's neck, which by this time had a crick in it —my father's voice, as he moved from tomb to tomb, deepened to a regal solemnity. He repeated Beaumont's great lines:

> "Mortality, behold and fear!
> What a change of flesh is here!"

laying a hand on my shoulder the while; and in the action I understood that this and all his previous discourse was addressed to me with a purpose, and that somehow our visit to London had to do with that purpose.

> "Here they lie had realms and lands
> Who now want strength to stir their hands;
> Where from their pulpits seal'd with dust
> They preach 'In greatness is no trust' . . .
> Here are sands, ignoble things,
> Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings. . . ."

I must have fallen a-wondering while he quoted in a low sonorous voice, half eager; for as it ceased I came to myself with a start and found his eyes searching me; also his hold on my shoulder had stiffened, and he held me from him at arm's length.

"And yet," said he as if to himself, "this dust is the strongest man can build with; and we must build in our generation—quickly, trusting in the young, firm flesh; yes, quickly—and trusting—though we know what its end must be."

These last words he muttered, and afterwards seemed to fall into a meditation which lasted until we found ourselves outside the Abbey and in the light again.

From Westminster we took boat to Blackfriars and, landing there, walked up through the crowded traffic to a gateway opening into Clement's Inn. I did not know its name at the time, nor did I regard the place as we entered, being yet fascinated with the sight of Temple Bar and of the heads of four traitors above it on poles, blackening in the sunshine; but within the courtyard we turned to the right and mounted a staircase to the head of the second flight and to a closed door on which my father knocked. A clerk opened, and presently we passed through an office into a well-sized room where, from amid a pile

of books, a grave little man rose, reached for his wig and, having adjusted it, bowed to us.

"Good morning! Good morning, gentlemen! Ah—er— Sir John Constantine, I believe?"

My father bowed. "At your service, Mr. Knox. You received my letter, then? Let me present my brother-in-law and man of affairs, Mr. Gervase Arundel, who will discuss with you the main part of our business; also my son here, about whom I wrote to you."

"Eh? Eh?" Mr. Knox, after bowing to my uncle, put on his spectacles, took them off, wiped them, put them on again, and regarded me benevolently. "Eh? so this is the boy—h'm—Jasper, I believe?"

"Prosper," my father corrected.

"Ah, to be sure—Prosper—and I hope he will, I'm sure." Mr. Knox chuckled at his mild little witticism and twinkled at me jocosely. "Your letter, Sir John? Yes, to be sure, I received it, and what you propose is practicable, though irregular."

"Irregular?"

"Not legally irregular—oh, no, not in the least. Legally the thing's as simple as A B C. The man has only to take the benefit of the Act of Insolvency, assign his estate to his creditors, and then—supposing that they are agreed——"

"There can be no question of their agreement or disagreement. His creditors do not exist. As I told you, I have paid them off, bought up all their debts, and the yes or no rests with me alone."

"Quite so; I was merely putting it as the Act directs. Very well then, supposing *you* agree, nothing more is necessary than an appearance—a purely formal appearance—at the Old Bailey, and your unfortunate friend——"

"Pardon me," my father put in; "he is not my friend."

"Eh?" . . . Mr. Knox removed his spectacles, breathed on them, and rubbed them, while he regarded my father with a bewildered air. "You'll excuse me . . . but I must own myself entirely puzzled. Even for a friend's sake, as I was about to protest, your conduct, sir, would be Quixotic; yes, yes, Quixotic in the highest degree, the amount being (as you might say) princely, and the security—" Mr. Knox paused and expressed his opinion of the security by a pitying smile. "But if," he resumed, "this man be not even your friend, then, my dear sir, I can merely wonder."

For a moment my father seemed about to argue with him, but checked himself.

"None the less the man is very far from being my friend," he answered quietly.

"But surely—surely, sir, you cannot be doing this in any hope to recover what he already owes you! That were indeed to throw the helve after the hatchet; nay, sir, it were madness—stark madness!"

My father glanced at my uncle Gervase, who stood pulling his lip; then with an abrupt motion he turned on Mr. Knox again.

"You have seen him? You delivered my letter?"

"I did."

"What was his answer?"

Mr. Knox shrugged his shoulders. "He jumped at it, of course."

"And the boy, here? What did he say about the boy?"

"Well, to speak truth, Sir John, he seemed passably amused by the whole business. The fact is, prison has broken him up. A fine figure he must have been in his time, but a costly one to maintain . . . as tall as yourself, Sir John, if not taller; and florid, as one may say; the sort of man that must have exercise and space and a crowd to admire him, not to mention wine and meats and female society. The Fleet has broken down all that. Even with liberty I wouldn't promise him another year of life; and, unless I'm mistaken, he knows his case. A rare actor, too! It wouldn't surprise me if he'd even deceived himself. But the mask's off. Your offer over-

joyed him; that goes without saying. In spite of all your past generosity this new offer obviously struck him for the moment as too good to be true. But I cannot say, Sir John, that he made any serious effort to keep up the imposture or pretend that the security which alone he can offer is more than a sentimental one. Not to put too fine a point on it, he ordered in a couple of bottles of wine at my expense, and over the second I left him laughing."

My father frowned. "And yet this man, Mr. Knox, is an anointed king."

"Of Corsica." Mr. Knox shrugged his shoulders. "You may take my word for it, he's an anointed actor—or was."

"One can visit him, I suppose?"

"At the most the turnkey will expect half a crown. Oh, dear me, yes! for a crowned head he's accessible."

My father took me by the arm. "Come along then, child. And you, Gervase, get your business through with Mr. Knox and follow us, if you can, in half an hour. You"—he turned to Billy Priske—"had best come with us. 'Tis possible I may need you all as witnesses."

He walked me out and downstairs and through the lodge gateway; and so under Temple Bar again and down Fleet Street through the throng; till near the foot of it, turning up a side street out of the noise,

we found ourselves in face of a gateway which could only belong to a prison. The gate itself stood open, but the passage led to an iron-barred door, and in the passage—which was cool but indescribably noisome—a couple of children were playing marbles with half a dozen turnkeys looking on, and (I believe) betting on the game.

My father sniffed the air in the passage and turned to me. "Gaol-fever," he announced. "Please God, child, we won't be in it long." He rescued Billy from the two urchins who had dropped their game to pinch his calves, and addressed a word to one of the turnkeys, at the same time passing a coin. The fellow looked at it and touched his hat.

"Second court, first floor, number thirty-seven." He opened a wicket in the gate. "This way, please, and sharp to the right."

The narrow court into which we descended by a short flight of steps was, as I remember, empty; but, passing under an archway and through a kind of tunnel, we entered a larger one crowded with men, some gathered in groups, others pacing singly and dejectedly, the most of them slowly, too, with bowed heads, but three or four with fierce strides as if in haste to keep an appointment. One of them, coming abreast of us as the turnkey led us off to a staircase on the left, halted, drew himself up, stared at us for

a moment with vacant eyes, and hurried by; yet before we mounted the stairs I saw him reach the farther wall, wheel, and come as hastily striding back.

The stairway led to a filthy corridor, pierced on the left with a row of tiny windows looking on the first and empty courtyard; and on the right with a close row of doors, the most of which stood open and gave glimpses of foul, disordered beds, broken meats, and barred windows crusted with London grime. The smell was pestilential. Our turnkey rapped on one of the closed doors, and half-flung, half-kicked it open; for a box had been set against it on the inside.

"Visitors for the Baron," he announced, and stood aside to let us enter. My father had ordered Billy to wait below. We two passed in together.

Now my father, as I have said, was a tall man; yet it seemed to me that the figure which greeted us was taller as it rose from the bed and stood between us and the barred dirty window. By little and little I made out that he wore an orange-coloured dressing-gown, and on his head a Turk's fez; that he had pushed back a table at which, seated on the bed, he had been writing; and that on the sill of the closed window behind him stood a geranium-plant dry with dust and withering in the stagnant air of the room.

But as yet, since he stood with his back to the little light, I could not make out his features. I marked, however, that he shook from head to foot.

My father bowed—a very reverent and stately bow it was too—regarded him for a moment, and, taking a pace backward to the door, called after the retreating turnkey, to whom he addressed some order in a tone to me inaudible.

"You are welcome, Sir John," said the prisoner as my father faced him again; "though to my shame I cannot offer you hospitality." He said it in English, with a thick and almost guttural foreign accent, and his voice shook over the words.

"I have made bold, sire, to order the remedy."

"'Sire!'" the prisoner took him up with a flash of spirit. "You have many rights over me, Sir John, but none to mock me, I think."

"As you have no right to hold me capable of it, in such a place as this," answered my father. "I addressed you in terms which my errand proves to be sincere. This is my son Prosper, of whom I wrote."

"To be sure—to be sure." The prisoner turned to me and looked me over—I am bound to say with no very great curiosity—and sideways, in the half-light, I had a better glimpse of his features, which were bold and handsome but dreadfully emaciated. He seemed to lose the thread of his speech, and his hands

strayed towards the table as if in search of something. "Ah, yes, the boy," said he vaguely.

The turnkey entering just then with two bottles of wine, my father took one from him and filled an empty glass that stood on the table. The prisoner's fingers closed over it.

"I have much to drown," he explained as, having gulped down the wine, he refilled his glass at once, knocking the bottle-neck on its rim in his clattering haste. "Excuse me; you'll find another glass in the cupboard behind you. . . . Yes, yes, we were talking of the boy. . . . Are you filled? . . . We'll drink to his health!"

"To your health, Prosper," said my father gravely, and drank.

"But, look here—I had your letter all right, and it sounds too good to be true. Only"—and into the man's eyes there crept a sudden cunning—"I don't understand what you want of me."

"You may think it much or little; but all we want—or, rather, all my boy wants—is your blessing."

"So I gathered; and that's funny, by God! *My* blessing—mine—and here!" He flung out a hand. "I've had some strange requests in my time; but damn me if I reckoned any man any longer wanted my blessing."

"My son does, though; and even such a blessing

as your own son would need, if you had one. You understand?"—for the prisoner's eyes had wandered to the barred window—"I mean the blessing of Theodore the First."

"You are a strange fellow, John Constantine," was the answer, in a weary, almost pettish tone. "God knows I have more reason to be grateful to you than to any man alive——"

"But you find it hard? Then give it over. You may do it with the lighter heart since gratitude from you—did I ever perceive it—would be offensive to me."

"If you played for this—worthless prize as it is—from the beginning——"

Again my father took him up; and, this time, sternly. "You know perfectly well that I never played for this from the beginning; nor had ever dreamed of it while there was a chance that you—or *she*—might leave a child. I will trouble you—" My father checked himself. "Your pardon, I am speaking roughly. I will beg you, sire, to remember first that you claimed and received my poor help while your infant daughter lived, while there was yet a likelihood of your having many children, before your wife left you, and a good year before I myself married or dreamed of marrying. I will beg you further to remember that no payment of what you

owed to me was ever enforced, and that the creditors who sent you and have kept you here are commercial persons with whom I had nothing to do; whose names until the other day were strange to me. *Now* I will admit that I play for a kingdom."

"You really think it worth while?" The prisoner, who had stood all this time blinking at the window, his hands in the pockets of his dirty dressing-gown, turned again to question him.

"I do."

"But listen a moment. I have had too many favours from you, and I don't want another under false pretences. You may call it a too-late repentance, but the fact remains that I don't. Liberty?"—he stretched out both gaunt arms, far beyond the sleeves of his gown, till they seemed to measure from side to side of the room and to thrust its walls wide. "Even with a week to live I would buy it dear—you don't know, John Constantine, how you tempt me—but not at that price."

"Your title is good. I will take the risk."

"How good or how bad my title is, you know. 'Tis the inheritance against which I warn you."

"I take the risk," my father repeated, "if you will sign."

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders and helped himself to another glassful.

"We must have witnesses," said my father. "Have you a clergyman in this den?"

"To be sure we have. The chaplain, we call him. Figg—Jonathan Figg's his name; the Reverend Jonathan Figg, B.A., of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge; a good fellow and a moderately hard drinker. He spends the best part of his morning marrying up thieves and sailors to trulls; but he's usually leaving church about this time, if a messenger can catch him before he's off to breakfast with 'em. Half an hour hence he'll be too drunk to sign his name."

"Prosper"—my father swung round on me—"run you down to Billy and take him off to search for this clergyman. If on your way you meet with your uncle and Mr. Knox, say that we shall require them, too, as witnesses."

I ran down to the courtyard, but no Billy could I see; only the dejected groups of prisoners, and among them the one I had marked before, still fiercely striding, and still, at the wall, returning upon his track. I hurried out to the gate, and there, to my amazement, found Billy in the clutches of a strapping impudent wench and surrounded by a ring of turnkeys, who were splitting their sides with laughter.

"I won't!" he was crying. "I'm a married man, I tell 'ee, and the father of twelve!"

"Oh, Billy!" I cried, aghast at the lie.

"There was no other way, lad. For the Lord's sake fetch Squire to deliver me!"

Before I could answer or ask what was happening, the damsel rounded on me.

"Boy," she demanded, "is this man deceiving me?"

"As for that, ma'am," I answered, "I cannot say. But that he's a bachelor I believe; and that he hates women I have his word over and over."

"Then he shall marry me or fight me," she answered very coolly, and began to strip off her short bodice.

"There's twelve o'clock," announced one of the turnkeys as the first stroke sounded from the clock above us over the prison gateway. "Too late to be married to-day; so a fight it is."

"A ring! a ring!" cried the others.

I looked in Billy's face, and in all my life (as I have since often reminded him) I never saw a man worse scared. The woman had actually thrown off her jacket and stood up in a loose under-bodice that left her arms free—and exceedingly red and brawny arms they were. How he had come into this plight I could guess as little as what the issue was like to be, when in the gateway there appeared my uncle and Mr. Knox, and close at their heels a rabble of men and women arm-in-arm, headed by a red-nosed clergy-

man with an immense white favour pinned to his breast.

"Hey? What's to do—what's to do?" inquired Mr. Knox.

The clergyman thrust past him with a "Pardon me, sir," and addressed the woman. "What's the matter, Nan? Is the bridegroom fighting shy?"

"Please your reverence, he tells me he's the father of twelve."

"H'm." The priest cocked his head on one side. "You find that an impediment?"

"*And* a married man, your reverence."

"Then he has the laughing side of you, this time," said his reverence promptly, and took snuff. "Tut, tut, woman—down with your fists, button up your bodice, and take disappointment with a better grace. Come, no nonsense, or you'll start me asking what's become of the last man I married ye to."

"Sir," interposed my uncle, "I know not the head or tail of this quarrel. But this man Priske is my brother's servant, and if he told the lady what she alleges, for the credit of the family I must correct him. In sober truth he's a bachelor and no more the father of twelve than I am."

This address, delivered with entire simplicity, set the whole company gasping. Most of all it seemed

to astonish the woman, who could not be expected to know that my uncle's chivalry accepted all her sex, the lowest with the highest, in the image in which God made it and without defacement.

The priest was the first to recover himself. "My good sir," said he, "your man may be the father of twelve or the father of lies, but I'll not marry him after stroke of noon, for that's my rule. Moreover" —he swept a hand towards the bridal party behind him—"these turtles have invited me to eat roast duck and green peas with 'em, and I hate my gravy cold."

"Ay, sir?" asked my uncle. "Do you tell me that folks marry and give in marriage within this dreadful place?"

"Now and then, sir; and in the liberties and purlieus thereof with a readiness that would astonish you; which, since I cannot hinder it, I sanctify. My name is Figg, sir—Jonathan Figg; and my office Chaplain of the Fleet."

"And, if it please you, sir," I put in, "my father has sent me in search of you, to request that you will come to him at once."

"And you have heard me say, young sir, that I marry no man after stroke of noon; no, nor will visit him sick unless he be *in articulo mortis.*"

"But my father neither wants to be married, sir,

nor is he sick at all. I believe it is some matter of witnessing an oath."

"Hath he better than roast duck and green peas to offer, hey? No? Then tell him he may come and witness *my* oath, that I'll see him first to Jericho."

"Whereby, if I mistake not," said Mr. Knox quietly, "your pocket will continue light of two guineas; and I may add, from what I know of Sir John Constantine, that he is quite capable, if he receive such an answer, of having your blood in a bottle."

"'Sir John Constantine?' did I hear you say. '*Sir* John Constantine?'" queried the Reverend Mr. Figg with a complete change of manner. "That's *quite* another thing! Anything to oblige Sir John Constantine, I'm sure——"

"Do you know him?" asked my uncle.

"Well—er—no; I can't honestly declare that I *know* him; but, of course, one knows *of* him—that is to say, I understand him to be a gentleman of title; a knight at least."

"Yes," my uncle answered, "he is at least that. What a very extraordinary person!" he added in a wondering aside, which I caught, though he had intended it for Mr. Knox alone.

Oddly enough, as we were leaving, I heard the woman Nan say pretty much the same of my

uncle. She added that she had a great mind to kiss him.

We found my father and the prisoner seated, with the bottle between them on the rickety liquor-stained table. Yet—as I remember the scene now—not all the squalor of the room could efface or diminish the majesty of their two figures. They sat like two tall old kings, eye to eye, not friends, or made friends only in this last and lonely hour, meditating man's common fate. If I cannot make you understand this, what follows will seem to you absurd, though indeed at the time it was not so.

My father rose as we entered. "Here is the boy returned," said he; "and the witnesses also if it please you."

The prisoner rose also. "I did not catch his name, or else I have forgotten it," he said, fixing his eyes on me and motioning me to step forward; which I did. His eyes—which before had seemed to me shifty—were straight now and commanding, yet benevolent.

"His name is Prosper; in full, John Prosper Camilio Paleologus. Never more than one of us bears the surname of Constantine, and he not until he succeeds as head of our house."

"One name is enough for a king." The prisoner motioned again with his hand.

"Kneel, boy," my father commanded, and I knelt.

"I ask you, gentlemen," said the prisoner, facing them and lifting his voice, "to hear and remember what I shall say; to witness and remember what I shall do; and by signature to attest what I shall presently write. I say, then, that I, Theodore, was on the fifteenth of April, twenty years ago, by the united voice of the people of Corsica, made King of that island and placed in possession of its revenues and chief dignities. I declare, as God may punish me if I lie, that by no act of mine or of my people of Corsica has that election been annulled, forfeited, or invalidated; that its revenues are to-day rightfully mine to receive and bequeath, as its dignities are to-day rightfully mine to enjoy or abdicate to an heir of my own choosing. I declare further that, failing male issue of my own body, I resign herewith and abdicate both rank and revenue in favour of this boy, Prosper Paleologus, son of Constantine, and heir in descent of Constantine, last Emperor of Constantinople. I lay my hands on him in your presence and bless him. In your presence I raise him and salute him on both cheeks, naming him my son of choice and my successor, Prosper I., King of the Commonwealth of Corsica. I call on you all to attest this act with your names, and all necessary writings confirming it; and I beseech you all to pray with me that he may

come to the full inheritance of his kingdom, and thrive therein as he shall justly and righteously administer it. God save King Prosper!"

At the conclusion of this speech, admirably delivered, I—standing with bent head as he had raised me, and with both cheeks tingling from his salutation—heard my father's voice say sonorously "Amen!" and another—I think the parson's—break into something like a chuckle. But my uncle must have put out a hand threatening his weasand, for the sound very suddenly gave place to silence; and the next voice I heard was Mr. Knox's.

"May I suggest that we seat ourselves and examine the papers?" said Mr. Knox.

"One moment." King Theodore stepped to the cupboard and drew out a bundle in a blue-and-white checked kerchief, and a smaller one in brown paper. The kerchief, having been laid on the table and unwrapped, disclosed a fantastic piece of ironwork in the shape of a crown, set with stones of which the preciousness was concealed by a plentiful layer of dust. He lifted this, set it on my head for a moment, and, replacing it on the table, took up the brown paper parcel.

"This," said he, "contains the Great Seal. To whose keeping"—he turned to my father—"am I to entrust them, Sir John?"

My father nodded towards Billy Priske, who stepped forward and tucked both parcels under his arm, while Mr. Knox spread his papers on the table.

. . . . .

We walked back to our lodgings that afternoon with Billy Priske behind us, bearing in his pocket the Great Seal, and under his arm, in a checked kerchief, the Iron Crown of Corsica.

Two mornings later we took horse and set our faces westward again; and thus ended my brief first visit to London. Billy Priske carried the sacred parcel on the saddle before him; and my uncle, riding beside him, spent no small part of the way in an exhortation against lying in general, and particularly against the sin of laying false claim to the paternity of twelve children.

Now, so shaken was Billy by his one adventure in London that until we had passed the tenth milestone he seemed content enough to be rated. I believe that as, for the remainder of his stay in London, he had never strayed beyond sight, so even yet he took comfort and security from my uncle's voice; "since" (said he, quoting a Cornish proverb) "'tis better be rated by your own than mated with a stranger." But, by and by, taking courage to protest that a lie might on occasion be pardonable and even necessary, he drew my father into the discussion.

"This difficulty of Billy's," interposed my father, "was in some sort anticipated by Plato, who instanced that a madman with a knife in his hand might inquire of you to direct him which way had been taken by the victim he proposed to murder. He posits it as a nice point. Should one answer truthfully, or deceive?"

"The villain! I should knock him down," answered my uncle with heat.

CHAPTER IV

THE MESSAGE OF THE SILENT MEN

We be all poor mariners,
Pardonnez moy, je vous en prie.—Old Song.

A HISTORY (you will say) which finds a schoolboy tickling trout, and by the end of another chapter has clapped a crown on his head and hailed him sovereign over a people of whom he has scarcely heard and knows nothing save that they are warlike and extremely hot-tempered, should be in a fair way to move ahead briskly. Nevertheless I shall pass over the first two years of the reign of King Prosper, during which he stayed at school and performed nothing worthy of mention; and shall come to a summer's afternoon at Oxford, close upon the end of term, when Nat Fiennes and I sat together in my rooms in New College—he, curled on the window-seat with a book, and I stretched in an easy chair by the fireplace, and deep in a news sheet.

"By the way, Nat," said I, looking up as I turned the page, "where will you spend your vacation?"

A groan answered me.

"Hullo!" I went on, making a hasty guess at his

case. "Has the little cordwainer's tall daughter jilted you, as I promised she would?"

"A curse on this age!" swore Nat, who ever carried his heart on his sleeve.

I began to hum:

"I loved a lass, a fair one,
As fair as e'er was seen;
She was indeed a rare one,
Another Sheba queen.
Her waist exceeding small,
The fives did fit her shoe;
But now, alas! sh' 'as left me,
Falero, lero, loo!"

"Curse the age!" repeated Nat viciously. "If these were Lancelot's days now, a man could run mad in the forest and lie naked and chew sticks; and then she'd be sorry."

"In summer time to Medley
My love and I would go;
The boatman there stood read'ly
My love and me to row,"

sang I, and ducked my head to avoid the cushion he hurled at me. "Well, then, there's very pretty forest land around my home in Cornwall, with undergrowth and dropped twigs to last you till Michaelmas term. So why not ride down with me and spend at least the forepart of your madness there?"

"I hate your Cornwall."

"'Tis a poor rugged land," said I; "but hath this convenience above your own home, that it contains no nymphs to which you have yet sworn passion. You may meet ours with a straight brow; and they are fair, too, and unembarrassed, though I won't warrant them if you run bare."

"'Tis never I that am inconstant."

"Never, Nat; 'tis she always and only—'she, she, and only she'—and there have been six of her to my knowledge."

"If I were a king, now——"

"T'cht!" said I (for as my best friend, and almost my sole one, he knew my story).

"If a fellow were a king now—instead of being doomed to the law—oh, good Lord!"

"You are incoherent, dear lad," said I; "and yet you tell me one thing plainly enough; which is that in place of loving this one or that one, or the cordwainer's strapping daughter, you are in love with being in love."

"Well, and why not?" he demanded. "Were I a king, now, that is even what I would be—in love with being in love. Were I a king, now, so deep in love were I with being in love, that my messengers should compass earth to fetch me the right princess. Yes, and could they not reach to her, if I but heard of one hidden and afar that was worth my loving, I

would build ships and launch them, enlist crews and armies, sail all seas and challenge all wars, to win her. If I were king, now, my love should dwell in the fastnesses of the mountains, and I would reach her; she should drive me to turn again and gather the bones of the seamen I had dropped overboard, and I would turn and dredge the seas for them; for a whim she should demand to watch me at the task, and gangs of slaves should level mountains to open a prospect from her window; nay, all this while she should deny me sight of her, and I would embrace that last hardship that in the end she might be the dearer prize, a queen worthy to sit beside. Man, heave your great lubberly bones out of that chair and salute a poor devil whom, as you put it, a cord-wainer's daughter has jilted."

"Hullo!" cried I, who had turned from his rhapsody to con the news again, and on the instant had been caught by a familiar name at the foot of the page.

"What is it?"

"Why," said I, reading, "it seems that you are not the only such madman as you have just proclaimed yourself. Listen to this: it is headed 'Falmouth.'

"'A Gentleman, having read that the Methodist Preachers are to pay a visit to Falmouth, Cornwall, on the 16th, 17th,

and 18th of next month; and that on the occasion of their last visit certain women, their sympathisers, were set upon and brutally handled by the mob; hereby announces that he will be present on the Market Strand, Falmouth, on these dates, with intent to put a stop to such behaviour, and invites any who share his indignation to meet him there and help to see fair play. The badge to be a red rose pinned in the hat.

(Signed) EUGENIO.'

"What think you of that?" I asked, without turning my head.

"The newspaper comes from Cornwall?" he asked.

"From Falmouth itself. My father sent it. . . . Jove!" I cried after a moment, "I wonder if he's answerable for this? 'Twould be like his extravagance."

"A pity but what you inherited some of it, then," said Nat crossly.

"Tell you what, Nat"—I slewed about in my chair—"come you down to Cornwall and we'll stick each a rose in our hats and help this Master Eugenio, whoever he is. I've a curiosity to discover him; and if he be my father—he has not marked the passage, by the way—we'll have rare fun in smoking him and tracking him unbeknown to the *rendezvous*. Come, lad, and if I know the Falmouth mob you shall have a pretty little turn-up well worth the journey."

But Nat, still staring out of the window, shook his head. He was in one of his perverse moods—and they had been growing frequent of late—in which nothing I could say or do seemed to content him; and for this I chiefly accused the cordwainer's daughter, who in fact was a decent, merry girl, fond of strawberries, with no more notion of falling in love with Nat than of running off with her father's apprentice. Whatever the cause of it, a cloud had been creeping over our friendship of late. He sought companions—some of them serious men—with whom I could not be easy. We kept up the pretence, but talked no longer with entirely open hearts. Yet I loved him; and now in a sudden urgent desire to carry him off to Cornwall with me and clear up all misunderstandings, I caught his arm and haled him down to our college garden, which lies close within the city wall; and there, pacing the broken military terrace, plied him with a dozen reasons why he should come. Still he shook his head to all of them; and presently, hearing four o'clock strike, pulled up in his walk and announced that he must be going—he had an engagement.

"And where?" I asked.

He confessed that it was to visit the poor prisoners shut up for debt in Bocardo.

I pulled a wry mouth, remembering the dismal

crew in the Fleet Prison. But though, the confession being forced from him, he ended wistfully and as if upon a question, I did not offer to come. It seemed a mighty dull way to finish a summer's afternoon. Moreover, I was nettled. So I let him go and watched him through the gate, thinking bitterly that our friendship was sick and drooping by no fault of mine.

The truth was—or so I tried to excuse him—that beside his plaguy trick of falling in and out of love he had an overhanging quarrel with his father, a worthy man, tyrannous when crossed, who meant him for the law. Nat abhorred the law and, foreseeing that the tussle must come, vexed his honest conscience with the thought that while delaying to declare war he was eating his father's bread. This thought, working upon the ferment of youth, kept him like a colt in a fretful lather. He scribbled verses, but never finished so much as a sonnet; he flung himself into religion, but chiefly (I think) to challenge and irritate his undevout friends; and he would drop any occupation to rail at me and what he was pleased to call my phlegm.

He had some reason, too, though at the time I could not discover it. Now, looking back, I can see into what a stagnant calm I had run. My boyhood should have been over; in body I had shot up to a

great awkward height; but for the while the man within me drowsed and hung fire. I lived in the passing day and was content with it. Nat's gusts of passion amused me, and why a man should want to write verses or fall in love was a mystery at which I arrived no nearer than to laugh. For this (strange as it may sound) I believe the visit to London was partly to blame. Nothing had come of it, except that the unhappy King Theodore had gained his release and improved upon it by dying a few weeks later, in wretched lodgings in Soho, where, at my father's expense, the church of St. Anne's now bore a mural tablet to his memory with an epitaph obligingly contributed by the Hon. Horace Walpole, since Earl of Orford.

Near this place is interred
THEODORE KING OF CORSICA
who died in this parish
Dec. 11, 1756
immediately after leaving
The King's Bench Prison
by the benefit of the Act of Insolvency
in consequence of which
he registered his kingdom of Corsica
for the use of his creditors.

The grave, great teacher, to a level brings
Heroes and beggars, galley slaves and kings;
But Theodore this moral learned ere dead:

Fate poured his lesson on his living head,
Bestow'd a kingdom, and denied him bread.

My father, who copied this out for me, had announced in few words poor Theodore's fate, but without particular allusion to our adventure, which, as he made no movement to follow it up, or none that he confided, I came in time to regard humorously as an escapade of his, a holiday frolic, a piece of midsummer madness. The serious part was that he had undoubtedly paid away large sums of money, and for two years my uncle Gervase had worn a distracted air which I set down to the family accounts. By degrees I came to conclude, with the rest of the world, that my father's brain was more than a little cracked, and sounded my uncle privately about this—delicately as I thought; but he met me with a fierce unexpected heat. "Your father," said he, "is the best man in the world, and I bid you wait to understand him better, taking my word that he has great designs for you." Sure enough, too, my father seemed to hint at this in the tenor of his conversation with me, which was ever of high politics and the government of states, or on some point which could be stretched to bear on these; but of any immediate design he forbore—as it seemed, carefully—to speak. Thus I found myself at pause and let my youth wait upon his decision.

Yet I had sense enough to feel less than satisfied with myself, albeit sorer with Nat as I watched the dear lad go from me across the turf and out at the garden gate. Nor will I swear that my eyes did not smart a little. I was but a boy, and I had set my heart on our travelling down to Cornwall together.

To Cornwall I rode down alone, a week later, and fell to work to idle my vacation away; fishing a little, but oftener sailing my boat—sometimes alone, sometimes with Billy Priske for company. Billy—whose duties as butler were what he called a *sine qua non,* pronounced as "shiny Canaan" and meaning a sinecure—had spent some part of term time in netting me a trammel, of which he was inordinately proud, and with this we amused ourselves, sailing or rowing down to the river's mouth every evening at nightfall to set it, and, again, soon after daybreak, to haul it, and usually returning with good store of fish for breakfast—soles, dories, plaice, and the red mullet for which Helford is famous over all streams.

Now, during these lazy weeks I had not forgotten Eugenio's advertisement, which, on returning to my rooms that evening after Nat's rebuff, I had clipped from the newspaper and since kept in my pocket. For the fun of it and to find out who this Eugenio might be—I had given over suspecting my father—my mind was made up to ride over to Falmouth on

the 16th of July; but whether with or without a rose in my hat I had not determined. Therefore on the morning of the 15th, when Billy, after hauling the trammel, began to lay our plans for the morrow, I cut him short, telling him that to-morrow I should not fish.

"What's matter with 'ee to-all?" he asked, smashing a spider-crab and picking it out piecemeal from the net. "Pretty fair catch to-day, id'n-a? spite of all the weed; an' no harm done by these varmints that a man can't put to rights afore evenin'."

I took the paddles without answering and pulled towards the river's mouth, while he sat and smoked his pipe over the business of clearing the net of weed, which for some days had been troublesome. Around his feet on the bottom boards lay our morning's catch —half a dozen soles and twice the number of plaice, a brace of edible crabs, six or seven red mullet, besides a number of gurnard and wrass worth no man's eating, an ugly-looking monkfish, and a bream of wonderful rainbow hues. A silvery fog lay over the sea, so dense that in places we could see but a bare score of yards; but over it the tops of the tall cliffs stood out clear, and the sun was mounting. A faint breeze blew from the southward. All promised a hot, still day.

The tide was making, too, and with wind and tide

to help I pulled over the river bar and, within it, towards the creek where daily, after hauling the trammel, I bathed from the boat; a delectable corner in the eye of the morning sunshine, paved fathoms deep with round, white pebbles, one of which, from the gunwale, I selected to dive for.

The sun broke through the sea-fog around us while I stripped; it shone, as I balanced myself for the plunge, on the broad wings of a heron flapping out from the wood's blue shadow; it shone on the scales of the fish struggling and gasping under the thwarts. Divine the river was, divine the morning, divine the moment—the last of my boyhood.

Souse I plunged and deep, with wide-open eyes, chose out and grasped my pebble, and rose to the surface, holding it high as though it had been a gem. The sound of the splash was in my ears and the echo of my own laugh, but with it there mingled a cry from Billy Priske, and, shaking the water out of my eyes, I saw him erect in the stern-sheets and astare at a vision parting the fog—the vision of a tall fore-and-aft sail, golden-grey against the sunlight, and above the sail a foot or two of a stout pole-mast, and above the mast a gilded truck and weather-vane with a tail of scarlet bunting. So closely the fog hung about her that for a second I took her to be a cutter; and then a second sail crept through the curtain, and

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I recognised her for the *Gauntlet* ketch, Port of Falmouth, Captain Jo Pomery, returned from six months' foreign. I announced her to Billy with a shout.

"As if a man couldn' tell that!" answered Billy, removing his cap and rubbing the back of his head. "What brings her in here, that's what I'm askin' ?"

"Belike," said I, scrambling over the gunwale, "the man has lost his bearings in this fog, and mistakes Helford for Falmouth entrance."

"Lost his bearin's! Jo Pomery lost his bearin's!" Billy regarded me between pity and reproach. "And him sailing her in from Blackhead close round the Manacles, in half a capful o' wind an' the tides lookin' fifty ways for Sunday! That's what he've a-done, for the weather lifted while we was hauling trammel—anyways east of south a man could see clear for three mile and more, an' not a vessel in sight there. There's maybe three men in the world besides Jo Pomery could ha' done it—the Lord knows how, unless 'tis by sense o' smell. And he've a-lost his bearin's, says you!"

"Well, then," I ventured, "perhaps he has a fancy to land part of his cargo duty free."

"That's likelier," Billy assented. "I don't say 'tis the truth, mind you, for if 'tis truth, why should the man choose to fetch land by daylight? Fog? A

man like Jo Pomery isn' one to mistake a little pride-o'-the-mornin' for proper thick weather—the more by token it's been liftin' this hour and more. But 'tis a likelier guess anyway, the *Gauntlet* being from foreign. Lost his bearin's, says you, and come, as you might say, slap through the Manacles; an' by accident, as you might say! Providence has a broad back, my son, but be careful how you dance 'pon it."

"Where does she come from?" I asked.

"Mediterranean; that's all I know. Four months and more she must ha' took on this trip. Iss; sailed out o' Falmouth back-along in the tail-end o' February, and her cargo muskets and other combustibles."

"Muskets?"

"Muskets; and you may leave askin' me who wants muskets out there, for in the first place I don't know, an' a still tongue makes a wise head."

I had slipped on shirt and breeches. "We'll give him a hail, anyway," said I, "and if there's sport on hand he may happen to let us join it." The ketch by this time was pushing her nose past the spit of rock hiding our creek from seaward. As she came by with both large sails boomed out to starboard and sheets alternately sagging loose and tautening with a jerk, I caught sight of two of her crew in the bows, the one looking on while the other very deliberately unlashed the anchor, and aft by the wheel a third

man, whom I made out to be Captain Pomery himself.

"*Gauntlet* ahoy!" I shouted, standing on the thwart and making a trumpet of my hands.

Captain Pomery turned, cast a glance towards us over his left shoulder, and lifted a hand. A moment later he called an order forward, and the two men left the anchor and ran to haul in sheets. Here was a plain invitation to pull alongside. I seized a paddle, and was working the boat's nose round, to pursue, when another figure showed above the *Gauntlet's* bulwarks: a tall figure in an orange-russet garment like a dressing-gown; a monk, to all appearance, for the sun played on his tonsured scalp as he leaned forward and watched our approach.

CHAPTER V

THE SILENT MEN

Seamen, seamen, whence come ye?
Pardonnez moy, je vous en prie.—Old Song.

A MONK he was too. A second and third look over my shoulder left me no doubt of it. He gravely handed us a rope as we overtook the ketch and ran alongside, and as gravely bowed when I leapt upon deck; but he gave us no other welcome.

His russet gown reached almost to his feet, which were bare; and he stood amid the strangest litter of a deck-cargo, consisting mainly—or so at first glance it seemed to me—of pot-plants and rude agricultural implements: spades, flails, forks, mattocks, picks, hoes, dibbles, rakes, lashed in bundles; sieves, buckets, kegs, bins, milk-pails, seed-hods, troughs, mangers, a wired dovecote, and a score of hen-coops filled with poultry. Forward of the mainmast stood a cart with shafts, upright and lashed to the mast, that the headsails might work clear. The space between the masts was occupied by enormous open hatchways through which came the lowing of oxen, and

through these, peering down into the hold, I saw the backs of cattle and horses moving in its gloom, and the bodies of men stretched in the straw at their feet.

So much of the *Gauntlet's* hugger-mugger I managed to discern before Captain Pomery left the helm and hurried forward to give us welcome on board.

"Mornin', Squire Prosper! Mornin', Billy! You know *me,* sir—Cap'n Jo Pomery—which is short for Job, and 'tis the luckiest chance, sir, you hailed me, for you'm nearabouts the first man I wanted to see. Faith, now, and I wonder how your father (God bless him) will take it?"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked I, with a glance at the monk, who had drawn back a pace and stood, still silent, fingering his rosary.

"The matter? Good Lord! isn't *this* matter enough?" Captain Jo waved an arm to include all the deck-cargo. "See them pot-plants, there, and what they'm teeled[1] in?"

"Drinking-troughs?" said I. "Or . . . is it coffins?"

"Coffins it is. I'd feel easier in mind if you could tell me what your father (God bless him) will say to it."

"But what has all this to do with my father?"

[1] Tilled.

I demanded, and, seeking Billy's eyes, found them as frankly full of amaze as my own.

"Not but what," continued Captain Jo, "they've behaved well, though dog-sick to a man from the time we left port. Look at 'em!"—he caught me by the arm and, drawing me to the hatchway, pointed down to the hold. "A round score and eight, and all well paid for as passengers; but for the return journey I won't answer. It depends on your father, and that" —with a jerk of his thumb towards the tall monk— "I stippilated when I shipped 'em. 'Never you mind,' was the answer I got; 'take 'em to England to Sir John Constantine.' And here they be!"

"But who on earth are they?" I cried, staring down into the gloom, where presently I made out that the men stretched in the straw at the horses' feet were monks all, and habited like the monk on the deck behind me. To him next I turned, to find his eyes, which were dark and quick, searching me curiously; and as I turned he made a step forward, put out a hand as if to touch me on the shirt-sleeve, and anon drew it back timidly, yet still continued to regard me.

"You are a son, signor, of Sir John Constantine?" he asked, in soft Italian.

"I am his only son, sir," I answered him in the same language.

"Ah! You speak my tongue?" A gleam of joy

passed over his grave features. "And you are his son? So—I should have guessed it at once, for you bear great likeness to him."

"You know my father, sir?"

"Years ago." His hands, which he used expressively, seemed to grope in a far past. "I come to him also from one who knew him years ago."

"Upon what business, sir? if I am allowed to ask."

"I bring a message." He pointed to his breast.

"You bring a tolerably full one, then," said I, glancing first at the disorder on deck and from that down to the recumbent figures in the hold.

"I speak for them," he went on, having followed the glance. "It is most necessary that they keep silence; but I speak for all."

"Then, sir, as it seems to me, you have much to say."

"No," he answered slowly; "very little, I think; very little, as you will see."

Here Captain Jo interrupted us. He had stepped back to steady the wheel, but I fancy that the word *silenzio* must have reached him, and that, small Italian though he knew, with this particular word the voyage had made him bitterly acquainted.

"Dumb!" he shouted. "Dumb as gutted haddocks!"

"Dumb?" I echoed, while the two seamen forward heard and laughed.

"It is their vow," said the monk gravely, and seemed on the point to say more.

But at this moment Captain Pomery sang out "Gybe-o!" At the warning we ducked our heads together as the boom swung over and the *Gauntlet*, heeling gently for a moment, rounded the river-bend in view of the great house of Constantine, set high and gazing over the folded woods. A house more magnificently placed, with forest, park, and great stone terraces rising in successive tiers from the water's edge, I do not believe our England in those days could show; and it deserved its site, being amply classical in design, with a façade that, discarding mere ornament, expressed its proportion and symmetry in bold straight lines, prolonged by the terraces on which tall rows of pointed yews stood sentinel. Right English though it was, it bore (as my father used to say of our best English poetry) the stamp of great Italian descent, and I saw the monk give a start as he lifted his eyes to it.

"We have not these creeks of water in Italy," said he, "nor these woods, nor these green lawns; and yet, if those trees, aloft there, were but cypresses—" He broke off. "Our voyage has a good ending," he added, half to himself.

The *Gauntlet* being in ballast and the tide high, Captain Pomery found plenty of water in the winding channel, every curve of which he knew to a hair, and steered for at its due moment, winking cheerfully at Billy and me, who stood ready to correct his pilotage. He had taken in his mainsail, and carried steerage way with mizzen and jib only; and thus, for close upon a mile, we rode up on the tide, scaring the herons and curlews before us, until drawing within sight of a grass-grown quay he let run down his remaining canvas and laid the ketch alongside, so gently that one of the seamen, who had cast a stout fender overside, stepped ashore, and with a slow pull on her main rigging checked and brought her to a standstill.

"*Aut Lacedæmonium Tarentum,*" said the monk at my shoulder quietly; and, as I stared at him, "Ah, to be sure, this is your Tarentum, is it not? Yet the words came to me for the sound's sake only and their falling close. Our voyage has even such a gentle ending."

"I had best run on," I suggested, "and warn my father of your coming."

"It is not necessary."

"But still," I urged, "they can be preparing breakfast for you, up at the house, while you and your friends are making ready to come ashore."

"We have broken our fast," he answered; "and we are quite ready, if you will be so good as to guide us."

He stepped to the hatchways and called down, announcing simply that the voyage was ended: and in the dusk there I saw monk after monk upheave himself from the straw and come clambering up the ladder; tall monks and short, old monks and young and middle-aged, lean monks and thickset—but the most of them cadaverous, and all of them yellow with seasickness; twenty-eight monks, all barefoot, all tolerably dirty, and all blinking in the fresh sunshine. When they were gathered, at a sign from one of them—by dress not distinguishable from his fellows—all knelt and gave silent thanks for the voyage accomplished.

I could see that Billy Priske was frightened: for arising they rolled their eyes about them like wild animals turned loose in an unfamiliar country, and the whites of their eyes were yellow (so to speak) with seafaring, and their pupils glassy with fever and from the sea's glare. But their spokesman touched my arm and motioned me to lead; and, when I obeyed, one by one the whole troop fell into line and followed at his feels.

Thus we went—I leading, with him and the rest in single file after me—up by the footpath through

the woods, and forth into sunshine again upon the green, dewy bracken of the deer-park. Here my companion spoke for the first time since disembarking.

"Your father, sir," said he, looking about him and seeming to sniff the morning air, "must be a very rich signor."

"On the contrary," I answered, "I have some reason to believe him a poor man."

He stared down for a moment at his bare feet, wet with the grasses. "Ah? Well, it will make no difference," he said; and we resumed our way.

As we climbed the last slope under the terraces of the house, I caught sight of my father leaning by a balustrade high above us, at the head of a double flight of broad stone steps, and splicing the top joint of a trout-rod he had broken the day before. He must have caught sight of us almost at the moment when we emerged from the woods.

He showed no surprise at all. Only as I led my guests up the steps he set down his work and, raising a hand, bent to them in a very courteous welcome.

"Good morning, lad! And good morning to those you bring, whencesoever they come."

"They come, sir," I answered, "in Jo Pomery's ketch *Gauntlet*; I believe from Italy; and I believe with a message for you."

My father lifted his gaze from me and bent it on

the spokesman at my elbow. His eyebrows lifted with surprise and sudden pleasure.

"Hey?" he exclaimed. "Is it my old friend——"

But the other, before his name could be uttered, lifted a hand. "My name is the Brother Basilio now, Sir John: no other am I permitted to remember. The peace of God be with you and upon your house!"

"And with you, Brother Basilio, since you will have it so: and with all your company! You bear a message for me? But first you must break your fast." He turned to lead the way to the house.

"We have eaten already, Sir John. As soon as your leisure serves, we would deliver our message."

My father called to Billy Priske—who hung in the rear of the monks—bidding him fetch my uncle Gervase in from the stables to the State Room, and so, without another word, motioned to his visitors to follow. To this day I can hear the shuffle of their bare feet on the steps and slabs of the terrace as they hurried after him to keep up with his long strides.

In the great entrance-hall he paused to lift a bunch of rusty keys off their hook, and, choosing the largest, unlocked the door of the State Room. The lock had been kept well oiled, for Billy Priske entered it twice daily; in the morning, to open a window or two, and at sunset, to close them. But it is a fact that I had

not crossed its threshold a score of times in my life, though I ran by it, maybe, as many times a day; nor (as I believe) had my father entered it for years. Yet it was the noblest room in the house, in length seventy-five feet, panelled high in dark oak and cedar and adorned around each panel with carvings of Grinling Gibbons—festoons and crowns and cherub-faces and intricate baskets of flowers. Each panel held a portrait, and over every panel, in faded gilt against the morning sun, shone an imperial crown. The windows were draped with hangings of rotten velvet. At the far end on a daïs stood a porphyry table, and behind it, facing down the room, a single chair, or throne, also of porphyry and rudely carved. For the rest the room held nothing but dust—dust so thick that our visitors' naked feet left imprints upon it as they huddled after their leader to the daïs, where my father took his seat, after beckoning me forward to stand on his right.

But of all bewildered faces there was never a blanker, I believe, since the world began than my uncle Gervase's; who now appeared in the doorway, a bucket in his hand, straight from the stables where he had been giving my father's roan horse a drench. Billy's summons must have hurried him, for he had not even waited to turn down his shirt-sleeves: but as plainly it had given him no sort of notion why he

was wanted and in the State Room. I guessed indeed that on his way he had caught up the bucket supposing that the house was afire. At sight of the monks he set it down slowly, gently, staring at them the while, and seemed in act of inverting it to sit upon, when my father addressed him from the daïs over the shaven heads of the audience.

"Brother, I am sorry to have disturbed you: but here is a business in which I may need your counsel. Will it please you to step this way? These guests of ours, I should first explain, have arrived from over seas."

My uncle came forward, still like a man in a dream, mounted the daïs on my father's left and, turning, surveyed the visitors in front.

"Eh? To be sure, to be sure," he murmured. Broomsticks?"

"Their spokesman here, who gives his name as the Brother Basilio, bears a message for me; and since he presents it in form with a whole legation at his back, I think it due to treat him with equal ceremony. Do you agree?"

"If you ask me," my uncle answered after a pause full of thought, "they would prefer to start, maybe, with a wash and a breakfast. By good luck, Billy tells me, the trammel has made a good haul. As for basins, brother, our stock will not serve all these gen-

tlemen: but if the rest will take the will for the deed and use the pump I'll go round meanwhile and see how the hens have been laying."

"You are the most practical of men, brother: but my offer of breakfast has already been declined. Shall we hear what Dom Basilio has to say?"

"I have nothing to say, Sir John," put in Brother Basilio, advancing, "but to give you this letter and await your answer."

He drew a folded paper from his tunic and handed it to my father, who rose to receive it, turned it over, and glanced at the superscription. I saw a red flush creep slowly up to his temples and fade, leaving his face extraordinarily pale. A moment later, in face of his audience, he lifted the paper to his lips, kissed it reverently, and broke the seal.

Again I saw the flush mount to his temples as he read the letter through slowly and in silence. Then after a long pause he handed it to me; and I took it wondering, for his eyes were dim and yet bright with a noble joy.

The letter (turned into English) ran thus:

To Sir John Constantine, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Star, at his house of Constantine in Cornwall, England.

My Friend,—The bearer of this and his company have been driven by the Genoese from their monastery of San Gior-

gio on my estate of Casalabriva above the Taravo valley, the same where you will remember our treading the vintage together to the freedom of Corsica. But the Genoese have cut down my vines long since, and now they have fired the roof over these my tenants and driven them into the *macchia*, whence they send message to me to deliver them. Indeed, friend, I have much ado to protect myself in these days: but by good fortune I have heard of an English vessel homeward bound which will serve them if they can reach the coast, when numbers of the faithful will send them off with good provision. Afterwards, what will happen? To England the ship is bound, and in England I know you only. Remembering your great heart, I call on it for what help you can render to these holy men. *Addio*, friend. You are remembered in my constant prayers to Christ, the Virgin, and all the Saints.

EMILIA.

At a sign from my father—who had sunk back in his chair and sat gripping its arms—I passed on this epistle to my uncle Gervase, who read it and ran his hand through his hair.

"Dear me!" said he, running his eye over the attentive monks, "this lady, whoever she may be——"

"She is a crowned queen, brother Gervase," my father interrupted; "and moreover she is the noblest woman in the world."

"As to that, brother," returned my uncle, "I am saying nothing. But speaking of what I know, I say she can be but poorly conversant with your worldly affairs."

My father half-lifted himself from his seat. "And is that how you take it?" he demanded sharply. "Is that all you read in the letter? Brother, I tell you again, this lady is a queen. What should a queen know of my degree of poverty?"

"Nevertheless—" began my uncle.

But my father cut him short again. "I had hoped," said he reproachfully, "you would have been prompt to recognise her noble confidence. Mark you how, no question put, she honours me. 'Do this, for my sake'—Who but the greatest in this world can appeal thus simply?"

"None, maybe," my uncle replied; "as none but the well-to-do can answer with a like ease."

"You come near to anger me, brother; but I remember that you never knew her. Is not this house large? Are not four-fifths of my rooms lying at this moment untenanted? Very well: for so long as it pleases them, since she claims it, these holy men shall be our guests. No more of this," my father commanded peremptorily, and added with all the gravity in the world, "You should thank her consideration rather, that she sends us visitors so frugal, since poverty degrades us to these economies. But there is one thing puzzles me," he went on, taking the letter again from my uncle and fastening his gaze

on the Brother Basilio. "She says she has much ado to protect herself."

"Indeed, Sir John," answered Brother Basilio, "I fear the queen, our late liege-lady, writes somewhat less than the truth. She wrote to you from a poor lodging hard by Bastia, having ventured back to Corsica out of Tuscany on business of her own; and on the eve of sailing we heard that she had been taken prisoner by the Genoese."

"What!" My father rose, clutching the arms of his chair. Of stone they were, like the chair itself, and well mortised: but his great grip wrenched them out of their mortises and they crashed on the daïs. "What! You left her a prisoner of the Genoese!" He gazed around them in a wrath that slowly grew cold, freezing into contempt. "Go, sirs; since she commands it, room shall be found for you all. My house for the while is yours. But go from me now."

CHAPTER VI

HOW MY FATHER OUT OF NOTHING BUILT AN ARMY, AND IN FIVE MINUTES PLANNED AN INVASION

Walled Townes, stored Arcenalls and Armouries, Goodly Races of Horse, Chariots of Warre, Elephants, Ordnance, Artillery, and the like: All this is but a Sheep in a Lion's Skin, except the Breed and disposition be stout and warlike. Nay, Number it selfe in Armies importeth not much where the People is of weake courage: For (as *Virgil* saith) It never troubles a Wolfe, how many the sheepe be.—Bacon.

For the rest of the day my father shut himself in his room, while my uncle spent the most of it seated on the brewhouse steps in a shaded corner of the back court, through which the monks brought in their furniture and returned to the ship for more. The bundles they carried were prodigious, and all the morning they worked without halt or rest, ascending and descending the hill in single file and always at equal distances one behind another. Watching from the terrace down the slope of the park as they came and went, you might have taken them for a company of ants moving camp. But my uncle never wholly recovered from the shock of his first fright, to see man by man cross the court with a stout coffin on his

back and above each coffin a pack of straw: nor was he content with Fra Basilio's explanation that the brethren slept in these coffins by rule and saved the expense of beds.

"For my part," said my uncle, "considering the numbers that manage it, I should have thought death no such dexterity as to need practice."

"Yet bethink you, sir, of St. Paul's words. 'I protest,' said he, 'I die daily.'"

"Why, yes, sir, and so do we all," agreed my uncle, and fell silent, on the very point, as it seemed, of continuing the argument. "I did not choose to be discourteous, lad," he explained to me later: "but I had a mind to tell him that we do daily a score of things we don't brag about—of which I might have added that washing is one: and I believe 'twould have been news to him."

I had never known my uncle in so rough a temper. Poor man! I believe that all the time he sat there on the brewhouse steps, he was calculating woefully the cost of these visitors; and it hurt him the worse because he had a native disposition to be hospitable.

"But who is this lady that signs herself Emilia?" I asked.

"A crowned queen, lad, and the noblest lady in the world—you heard your father say it. This evening he may choose to tell us some further particulars."

"Why this evening?" I asked, and then suddenly remembered that to-day was the 15th of July and St. Swithin's feast; that my father would not fail to drink wine after dinner in the little temple below the deer-park; and that he had promised to admit me to-night to make the fourth in St. Swithin's brotherhood.

He appeared at dinner time, punctual and dressed with more than his usual care (I noted that he wore his finest lace ruffles); and before going in to dinner we were joined by the Vicar, much perturbed—as his manner showed—by the news of a sudden descent of papists upon his parish. Indeed the good man so bubbled with it that we had scarcely taken our seats before the stream of questions overflowed. "Who were these men?" "How many?" "Whence had they come, and why?" etc.

I glanced at my father in some anxiety for his temper. But he laughed and carved the salmon composedly. He had a deep and tolerant affection for Mr. Grylls. "Where shall I begin?" said he. "They are, I believe, between twenty and thirty in number, though I took no care to count; and they belong to the Trappistine Order, to which I have ever been attracted; first, because I count it admirable to renounce all for a faith, however frantic, and secondly for the memory of Bouthillier de Rancé, who

a hundred years ago revived the order after five hundred years of desuetude."

"And who was he?" inquired the Vicar.

"He was a young rake in Paris, tonsured for the sake of the family benefices, who had for mistress no less a lady than the Duchess de Rohan-Montbazon. One day, returning from the country after a week's absence and letting himself into the house by a private key, he rushed upstairs in a lover's haste, burst open the door, and found himself in a chamber hung with black and lit with many candles. His mistress had died, the day before, of a putrid fever. But—worse than this and most horrible—the servants had ordered the coffin in haste; and, when delivered, it was found to be too short. Upon which, to have done with her, in their terror of infection, they had lopped off the head, which lay pitiably dissevered from the trunk. For three years after the young man travelled as one mad, but at length found solace in his neglected abbacy of Soligny-la-Trappe, and in reviving its extreme Cistercian rigours."

"I had supposed the Trappists to be a French order in origin, and confined to France," said the Vicar.

"They have offshoots: of which I knew but one in Italy, that settled some fifty years back in a monastery they call Buon-Solazzo, outside Florence, at the

invitation of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. But I have been making question of our guests through Dom Basilio, their guest-master and abbot *de facto* (since their late abbot, an old man whom he calls Dom Polifilo, died of exposure on the mountains some three days before they embarked); and it appears that they belong to a second colony, which has made its home for these ten years at Casalabriva in Corsica, having arrived by invitation of the Queen Emilia of that island, and there abiding until the Genoese burned the roof over their heads."

The Vicar sipped his wine.

"You have considered," he asked, "the peril of introducing so many papists into our quiet parish?"

"I have not considered it for a moment," answered my father cheerfully. "Nor have I introduced them. But if you fear they'll convert—pervert—subvert—invert your parishioners and turn 'em into papists, I can reassure you. For in the first place thirty men, or thirty thousand, of whom only one can open his mouth, are, for proselytising, equal to one man and no more."

"They can teach by their example if not by their precept," urged the Vicar.

"Their example is to sleep in their coffins. My good sir, if you will not trust your English doctrine

to its own truth, you might at least rely on the persuasiveness of its comfort. Nay, pardon me, my friend," he went on, as the Vicar's either cheekbone showed a red flush, "I did not mean to speak offensively; but Englishman as I am, in matters of religion my countrymen are ever a puzzle to me. At a great price you won your freedom from the Bishop of Rome and his dictation. I admire the price and I love liberty; yet liberty has its drawbacks, as you have for a long while been discovering; of which the first is that every man with maggot in his head can claim a like liberty with yourselves, quoting your own words in support of it. Let me remind you of that passage in which Rabelais—borrowing, I believe, from Lucian—brings the good Pantagruel and his fellow-voyagers to a port which he calls the Port of Lanterns. 'Then (says he) upon a tall tower Pantagruel recognised the Lantern of La Rochelle, which gave us an excellent, clear light. Also we saw the Lanterns of Pharos, of Nauplia, and of the Acropolis of Athens, sacred to Pallas,' and so on; whence I draw the moral that coast-lights are good, yet, multiplied, they complicate navigation."

"—and apply your moral by erecting yet another!"

"Fairly retorted. Yet how can you object without turning the sword of Liberty against herself? Have

you never heard tell, by the way, of Captain Byng's midshipman?"

"Who was he?"

"I forget his name, but he started his first night aboard ship by kneeling down and saying his prayers, as his mother had taught him."

"I commend the boy," said my uncle.

"I also commend him: but the crowd of his fellow-midshipmen found it against the custom of the service and gave him the strap for it. This, however, raised him up a champion in one of the taller lads, who protested that their conduct was tyrannous: 'and,' said he very very generously, 'to-morrow night I too propose to say my prayers. If any one object, he may fight me.' Thus, being a handy lad with his fists, he established the right of religious liberty on board. By and by one or two of the better-disposed midshipmen followed his example: by degrees the custom spread along the lower deck, where the dispute had happened in full view of the whole ship's company, seamen and marines; and by the time she reached her port of Halifax she hadn't a man on board (outside the ward-room) but said his prayers regularly."

A notable Christian triumph," was the Vicar's comment.

"Quite so. At Halifax," pursued my father,

"Captain Byng took aboard out of hospital another small midshipman, who on his first night no sooner climbed into his hammock than the entire mess bundled him out of it. 'We would have you to know, young man,' said they, 'that private devotion is the rule on board our ship. It's down on your knees this minute or you get the strap.'

"I leave you," my father concluded, "to draw the moral. For my part the tale teaches me that in any struggle for freedom the real danger begins with the moment of victory."

Said my uncle Gervase after a pause, "Then these Corsicans of yours, brother, stand as yet in no real danger, since the Genoese are yet harrying their island with fire and sword."

"In no danger at all as regards their liberty," answered my father, poising his knife for a first cut into the saddle of mutton, "though in some danger, I fear me, as regards their queen. They have, however, taken the first and most important step by getting the news carried to me. The next is to raise an army; and the next after that, to suit the plan of invasion to our forces. Indeed," wound up my father with another flourish of his carving-knife. "I am in considerable doubt where to make a start."

"I hold," said my uncle, eyeing the saddle of mut-

ton, "that you save the gravy by beginning close alongside the chine."

"I was thinking for my part that either Porto or Sagone would serve us best," said my father meditatively.

Dinner over, the four of us strolled out abreast into the cool evening and down through the deer-park to the small Ionic temple, where Billy Priske had laid out fruit, wine, and glasses; and there, with no more ceremony than standing to drink my health, the three initiated me into the brotherhood of St. Swithin. It gave me a sudden sense of being grown a man, and this sense my father very promptly proceeded to strengthen.

"I had hoped," said he, putting down his glass and seating himself, "to delay Prosper's novitiate. I had designed, indeed, that after staying his full time at Oxford he should make the Grand Tour with me and prepare himself for his destiny by a leisured study of cities and men. But this morning's news has forced me to reshape my plans. Listen:

"In the early autumn of 1735, being then at the Court of Tuscany, I received sudden and secret orders to repair to Corte, the capital of Corsica, an island of which I knew nothing beyond what I had learnt in casual talk from the Count Domenico Rivarola, who then acted as its plenipotentiary at Flor-

ence. He was a man with whom I would willingly have taken counsel, but my orders from England expressly forbade it. Rivarola in fact was suspected —and justly as my story will show—of designs of his own for the future of the island; and although, as it will also show, we had done better to consult him— Walpole's injunctions were precise that I should by every means keep him in the dark.

"The situation—to put it as briefly as I can—was this. For two hundred years or so the island had been ruled by the Republic of Genoa; and, by common consent, atrociously. For generations the islanders had lived in chronic revolt, under chiefs against whom the Genoese—or, to speak more correctly, the Bank of Genoa—had not scrupled to apply every device, down to secret assassination. *Uno avolso non deficit alter:* the Corsicans never lacked a leader to replace the fallen: and in 1735 the succession was shared by two noble patriots, Giafferi and Hyacinth Paoli.

"Under their attacks the Genoese were slowly but none the less certainly losing their hold on the island. Their plight was such that, although no one knew precisely what they would do, every one foresaw that, failing some heroic remedy, they must be driven into the sea, garrison after garrison, and lose Corsica altogether; and of all speculations the most probable

seemed that they would sell the island, with all its troubles, to France. Now for France to acquire so capital a *point d'appui* in the Mediterranean would obviously be no small inconvenience to England: and therefore our Ministers—who had hitherto regarded the struggles of the islanders with indifference—woke up to a sudden interest in Corsican affairs.

"They had no excuse for interfering openly. But if the Corsicans would but take heart and choose themselves a king, that king could at a ripe moment be diplomatically acknowledged; and any interference by France would at once become an act of violent usurpation. (For let me tell you, my friends—the sufferings of a people count as nothing in diplomacy against the least trivial act against a crown.) The nuisance was, the two Paolis, Giafferi and Hyacinth, had no notion whatever of making themselves kings; nor would their devoted followers have tolerated it. Yet—as sometimes happens—there was a third man, of greater descent than they, to whom at a pinch the crown might be offered, and with a far more likely chance of the Corsicans' acquiescence. This was a Count Ugo Colonna, a middle-aged man, descended from the oldest nobility of the island, and head of his family, which might more properly be called a clan; a patriot, in his way, too, though lacking the fire of the Paolis, to whom he had sur-

rendered the leadership while remaining something of a figurehead. In short my business was to confer with him at Corte, persuade the Corsican chiefs to offer him the crown, and persuade him to accept it.

"I arrived then at the capital and found Count Ugo willing enough, though by no means eager, for the honour. He was in fact a mild-mannered gentleman of no great force of character, and frequently interrupted our conference to talk by choice of a bowel-complaint which obviously meant more to him than all the internal complications of Europe: and next to his bowel-complaint—but some way after—he prized his popularity, which ever seemed more important than his country's welfare: or belike he confused the two. He was at great pains to impress me with the sacrifices he had made for Corsica—which in the past had been real enough: but he had come to regard them chiefly as matter for public speaking, or excuse for public bowing and lifting of the hat. You know the sort of man, I dare say. To pass that view of life, at his age, is the last test of greatness.

"Still, the notion of being crowned King of Corsica tickled his vanity, and would have tickled it more had he begotten a son to succeed him. It opened new prospects of driving through crowds and

bowing and lifting his hat: and he turned pardonably sulky when the two Paolis treated my proposals with suspicion. They had an immense respect for England as the leader of the free peoples: but they wanted to know why in Tuscany I had not taken their Count Rivarola into my confidence. In fact they were in communication with their plenipotentiary already, and half-way towards another plan, of which very excusably they allowed me to guess nothing.

"The upshot was that my interference threw Count Ugo into a pet with them. He only wanted them to press him; was angry at not being pressed; yet believed that they would repent in time. Meanwhile he persuaded me to ride back with him to one of his estates, a palace above the valley of the Taravo.

"I know not why, but ever the vow of Jephthah comes to my mind as I remember how we rode up the valley to Count Ugo's house in the hour before sunset. 'And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances, and she was his only child.' He had made no vow and was incapable, poor man, of keeping any so heroic; and she came out with no timbrel or dance, but soberly enough in her sad-coloured dress of the people. Yet she came out while we rode a good mile off, and waited for

us as we climbed the last slope, and she was his only child.

"How shall I tell you of her? She helped my purpose nothing, for at first she was vehemently opposed to her father's consenting to be king. Her politics she derived in part from the reading of Plutarch's Lives and in part from her own simplicity. They were childish, utterly: yet they put me to shame, for they glowed with the purest love of her country. She has walked on fiery ploughshares since then; she has trodden the furnace, and her beautiful bare feet are seared since they trod the cool vintage with me on the slopes above the Taravo . . . Priske, open the first of those bottles, yonder, with the purple seal! Here is that very wine, my friends. Pour and hold it up to the sunset before you taste. Had ever wine such a royal heart? I will tell you how to grow it. Choose first of all a vineyard facing south, between mountains and the sea. Let it lie so that it drinks the sun the day through; but let the protecting mountains carry perpetual snow to cool the land breeze all the night. Having chosen your site, drench it for two hundred years with the blood of freemen; drench it so deep that no tap-root can reach down below its fertilising virtue. Plant it in defeat, and harvest it in hope, grape by grape, fearfully, as though the bloom on each were a state's

ransom. Next treat it after the recipe of the wine of Cos; dropping the grapes singly into vats of sea water, drawn in stone jars from full fifteen fathoms in a spell of halcyon weather and left to stand for the space of one moon. Drop them in, one by one, until the water scarcely covers the mass. Let stand again for two days, and then call for your maidens to tread them, with hymns, under the new moon. Ah, and yet you may miss! For your maidens must be clean, and yet fierce as though they trod out the hearts of men, as indeed they do. A king's daughter should lead them, and they must trample with innocence, and yet with such fury as the prophet's who said 'their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment: for the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come' . . ."

My father lifted his glass. "To thee, Emilia, child and queen!"

He drank, and, setting down his glass, rested silent for a while, his eyes full of a solemn rapture.

"My friends," he went on at length with lowered voice, "know you that old song?

> "Methought I walked still to and fro,
> And from her company could not go—
> But when I waked it was not so:
> In youth is pleasure, in youth is pleasure.

"All that autumn I spent under her father's roof, and—my leave having been extended—all the winter following. The old Count had convinced himself by this time that by accepting the crown he would confer a signal service on Corsica, and had opened a lengthy correspondence with the two Paolis, whose hesitation to accept this view at once puzzled and annoyed him. For me, I wished the correspondence might be prolonged for ever, for meanwhile I lived my days in company with Emilia, and we loved.

"I was a fool. Yet I cannot tax myself that I played false to duty, though by helping to crown her father I was destroying my own hopes, since as heiress to his throne Emilia must be far removed from me. We scarcely thought of this, but lived in our love, we two. So the winter passed and the spring came and the *macchia* burst into flower.

"Prosper, you have never set eyes on the *macchia,* the glory of your kingdom. But you shall behold it soon, lad, and smell it—for its fragrance spreads around the island and far out to sea. It belts Corsica with verdure and a million million flowers—cistus and myrtle and broom and juniper; clematis and vetch and wild roses run mad. Deeper than the tall forests behind it, the *macchia* will hide two lovers, and under the open sky hedge off all the world but

their passion . . . In the *macchia* we roamed together, day after day, and forgot the world; forgot all but honour; for she, my lady, was a child of sixteen, and as her knight I worshipped her. Ah, those days! those scented days!

"But while we loved and Count Ugo wrote letters, the two Paolis were doing; and by and by they played the strangest stroke in all Corsica's history. That spring, at Aleria on the east coast, there landed a man of whom the Corsicans had never heard. He came out of nowhere with a single ship and less than a score of attendants—to be precise, two officers, a priest, a secretary, a major-domo, an under-steward, a cook, three Tunisian slaves, and six lackeys. He had sailed from Algiers, with a brief rest in the port of Leghorn, and he stepped ashore in Turkish dress, with scarlet-lined cloak, turban, and scimitar. He called himself Theodore, a baron of Westphalia, and he brought with him a shipload of arms and ammunition, a thousand zechins of Tunis, and letters from half a dozen of the Great Powers promising assistance. Whether these were genuine or not, I cannot tell you.

"Led by the two Paolis—this is no fairy tale, my friends—the Corsicans welcomed and proclaimed him king, without even waiting for despatches from Count Rivarola (who had negotiated) to inform

them of the terms agreed upon. They led him in triumph to Corte, and there, in their ancient capital, crowned and anointed him. He gave laws, issued edicts, struck money, distributed rewards. He put himself in person at the head of the militia, and blocked up the Genoese in their fortified towns. For a few months he swept the island like a conqueror.

"All this, as you may suppose, utterly disconcerted the Count Ugo Colonna, who saw his dreams topple at one stroke into the dust. But the chiefs found a way to reconcile him. Their new King Theodore must marry and found a dynasty. Let a bride be found for him in Colonna's daughter, and let children be born to him of the best blood in Corsica.

"The Count recovered his good temper; his spirits rose at a bound: he embraced the offer. His grandsons should be kings of Corsica. And she—my Emilia——

"We met once—once only—after her father had broken the news to her. He had not asked her consent: he had told her, in a flutter of pride, that this thing must be, and for her country's sake. She came to me, in the short dusk, upon the terrace overlooking the Taravo. She was of heart too heroic to linger out our agony. In the dusk she stretched out both hands—ah, God, the child she looked! so help-

less, so brave!—and I caught them and kissed them. Then she was gone.

"A week later they married her to King Theodore in the Cathedral of Corte, and crowned her beside him. Before the winter he left the island and sailed to Holland to raise moneys; for the promises of the Great Powers had come to nothing, even if they were genuinely given. For myself, I had bidden good-bye to Corsica and sailed for Tuscany on the same day that he was married.

"Now I must tell you that on the eve of sailing I wrote a letter to the queen—as queen she would be by the time it reached her—wishing her all happiness and adding that if, in the time to come, fate should bring her into poverty or danger, my estate and my life would ever be at her service. To this I received, as I had expected, no answer: nor did she, if ever she received it, impart its contents to her husband. He—the rascal—had a genius for borrowing, and yet 'twas I that had to begin by seeking him out to feed him with money.

"News came to me that he was in straits in Holland, and had for a year been drumming the banks in vain: also that the Genoese, whom his incursion had merely confounded, were beginning to lift their heads and take the offensive again. At first he had terrified them like a mad dog; the one expedient they

could hit on was to set a price upon his head. Certainly he had gifts. He contrived—and by sheer audacity, mark you, backed by a fine presence—to drive them into such a panic that, months after he had sailed, they were petitioning France to send over troops to help them. The Corsicans sent a counter-embassy. 'If,' said they to King Louis, 'your Majesty force us to yield to Genoa, then let us drink this bitter cup to the health of the Most Christian King, and die.' King Louis admired the speech but nibbled at the opportunity. Our own Government meanwhile had either lost heart or suffered itself to be persuaded by the Genoese Minister in London. In the July after my Emilia's marriage, our late Queen Caroline, as regent for the time of Great Britain, issued a proclamation forbidding any subject of King George to furnish arms or provisions to the Corsican malcontents.

"And now you know, my dear Prosper, why I cast away the career on which I had started with some ambition. My lady lacked help, which as a British subject I was prohibited from offering. My conscience allowed me to disobey: but not to disobey and eat his Majesty's bread. I flung up my post, and as a private man hunted across Europe for King Theodore.

"I ran him to earth in Amsterdam. He was in

handsome lodgings, but penniless. It was the first time I had conversed with him; and he, I believe, had never seen my face. I found him affable, specious, sanguine, but hollow as a drum. For *her* sake I took up and renewed the campaign among the Jew bankers.

"To be short, he sailed back for Corsica in a well-found ship, with cannon and ammunition on board, and some specie—the whole cargo worth between twenty and thirty thousand pounds. He made a landing at Tavagna and threw in almost all his warlike stores. His wife hurried to meet him: but after a week, finding that the French were pouring troops into the island, and becoming (they tell me) suddenly nervous of the price on his head, he sailed away almost without warning. They say also that on the passage he murdered the man whom his creditors had forced him to take as supercargo, sold the vessel at Leghorn, and made off with the specie—no penny of which had reached his queen or his poor subjects. She—sad childless soul—driven with her chiefs and counsellors into the mountains before the combined French and Genoese, escaped a year later to Tuscany, and hid herself with her sorrows in a religious house ten miles from Florence.

"So ended this brief reign: and you, Prosper, have met the chief actor in it. A very few words

will tell the rest. The French overran the island until '41, when the business of the Austrian succession forced them to withdraw their troops and leave the Genoese once more face to face with the islanders. Promptly these rose again. Giafferi and Hyacinth Paoli had fled to Naples; Hyacinth with two sons, Pascal and Clement, whom he trained there (as I am told) in all the liberal arts and in undying hatred of the Genoese. These two lads, returning to the island, took up their father's fight, and have maintained it, with fair success as I learn. From parts of the island they must have completely extruded the enemy for a while; since my lady made bold, four years ago, to settle these visitors of ours in her palace above the Taravo. It would appear, however, that the Genoese have gathered head again, and his business with them may explain why Pascal Paoli has not answered the letter I addressed to him, these eight months since, notifying my son's claim upon the succession. Or he may have reckoned it indecent of me to address him in lieu of his queen, who had returned to the island. I had not heard of her return. I heard of it to-day for the first time, and of her peril, which shall hurry us ten times faster than our pretensions. Prosper," my father concluded, "we must invade Corsica, and at once."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed my uncle. "How?"

"In a ship," my father answered him as simply. "How otherwise?"

Said my uncle, "But where is your ship?"

Answered my father, "If you will but step outside and pick up one of these fir-cones in the grass, you can almost toss it on to her deck. She is called the *Gauntlet*, and her skipper is Captain Jo Pomery. I might have racked my brain for a month to find as good a skipper or a ship so well found and happily named as these which Providence has brought to my door. I attach particular importance to the name of a ship."

My uncle ran his hands through his hair. "But to invade a kingdom," he protested, "you will need also an army!"

"Certainly. I must find one."

"But where?"

"It must be somewhere in the neighbourhood, and within twenty-four hours," replied my father imperturbably. "Time presses."

"But an army must be paid. You have not only to raise one, but to find the money to support it."

"You put me in mind of an old German tale," said my father, helping himself to wine. "Once upon a time there were three brothers—but since, my dear Gervase, you show signs of impatience, I will confine myself to the last and luckiest one. On

his travels, which I will not pause to describe in detail, he acquired three gifts—a knapsack which, when opened, discharged a regiment of grenadiers; a cloth which, when spread, was covered with a meal; and a purse which, when shaken, filled itself with money."

"Will you be serious, brother?" cried my uncle.

"I am entirely serious!" answered my father. "The problem of an army and its pay I propose to solve by enlisting volunteers; and the difficulty of feeding my troops (I had forgotten it and thank you for reminding me) will be minimised by enlisting as few as possible. Myself and Prosper make two; Priske, here, three; I would fain have you accompany us, Gervase, but the estate cannot spare you. Let me see—" He drummed for a moment on the table with his fingers. "We ought to have four more at least, to make a show: and seven is a lucky number."

"You seriously design," my uncle demanded, "to invade the island of Corsica with an army of seven persons?"

"Most seriously I do. For consider. To begin with, this Theodore—a vain, hollow man—brought but sixteen, including many non-combatants, and yet succeeded in winning a crown. You will allow that to win a crown is a harder feat than to succeed to one.

On what reckoning then, or by what Rule-of-Three sum, should Prosper, who goes to claim what already belongs to him, need more than seven?

"Further," my father continued, "it may well be argued that the fewer he takes the better; since we sail not against the Corsicans but against their foes, and therefore should count on finding in every Corsican a soldier for our standard.

"Thirdly, the Corsicans are a touchy race, whom it would be impolitic to offend with a show of foreign strength.

"Fourthly, we must look a little beyond the immediate enterprise, and not (if we can help it) saddle Prosper's kingdom with a standing army. For, as Bacon advises, that state stands in danger whose warriors remain in a body and are used to donatives; whereof we see examples in the Turk's Janissaries and the Pretorian Bands of Rome.

"And fifthly, we have neither the time nor the money to collect a stronger force. The occasion presses; and *fronte capillata est, post hæc Occasio calva:* Time turns a bald head to us if we miss our moment to catch him by the forelock."

"The Abantes," put in Mr. Grylls, "practised the direct contrary: of whom Homer tells us that they shaved the forepart of their heads, the reason being that their enemies might not grip them by the hair

in close fighting. I regret, my dear Constantine, you never warned me that you designed Prosper for a military career. We might have bestowed more attention on the warlike customs and operations of the ancients."

My father sipped his wine and regarded the Vicar benevolently. For closest friends he had two of the most irrelevant thinkers on earth and he delighted to distinguish between their irrelevancies.

"But I would not," he continued, "have you doubt that the prime cause of our expedition is to deliver my lady from the Genoese; or believe that Prosper will press his claims unless she acknowledge them."

"I am wondering," said my uncle, "where you will find your other four men."

"Prosper and I will provide them to-morrow," my father answered with a careless glance at me. "And now, my friends, we have talked overlong of Corsica and nothing as yet of that companionship which brings us here—it may be for the last time. Priske, you may open another four bottles and leave us. Gervase, take down the book from the cupboard and let the Vicar read to us while the light allows."

"The marker tells me," said the Vicar, taking the book and opening it, "that we left off in the midst of Chapter 8—*On the Luce or Pike.*"

"Ay, and so I remember," my uncle agreed.

The Vicar began to read:

And for your dead bait for a pike, for that you may be taught by one day's going a-fishing with me or any other body that fishes for him; for the baiting of your hook with a dead gudgeon or a roach and moving it up and down the water is too easy a thing to take up any time to direct you to do it. And yet, because I cut you short in that, I will commute for it by telling you that that was told me for a secret. It is this: Dissolve gum of ivy in oil of spike, and therewith anoint your dead bait for a pike, and then cast it into a likely place, and when it has lain a short time at the bottom, draw it towards the top of the water and so up the stream, and it is more than likely that you have a pike follow with more than common eagerness. And some affirm that any bait anointed with the marrow of the thigh-bone of a heron is a great temptation to any fish.

These have not been tried by me, but told me by a friend of mine, that pretended to do me a courtesy. But if this direction to catch a pike thus do you no good, yet I am certain this direction how to roast him when he is caught is choicely good——

"Upon my soul, brother," interrupted my uncle Gervase, removing the pipe from his mouth, "this reads like a direction for the taking of Corsica."

CHAPTER VII

THE COMPANY OF THE ROSE

Alway be merry if thou may,
But waste not thy good alway:
Have hat of floures fresh as May,
Chapelet of roses of Whitsonday
For sich array ne costneth but lyte.
—*Romaunt of the Rose.*

Somerset. Let him that is no coward
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.
—*First Part of King Henry VI.*

Early next morning I was returning, a rosebud in my hand, from the neglected garden to the east of the house, when I spied my father coming towards me along the terraces, and at once felt my ears redden.

"Good morning, lad!" he hailed. "But where is mine?"

I turned back in silence and picked a bud for him. "So," said I, "'twas you, sir, after all, that wrote the advertisement?"

"Hey?" he answered. "I? Certainly not. I noted it and sent you the news-sheet in half a hope that you had been the advertiser."

"You were mistaken, sir."

He halted and rubbed his chin. "Then who the devil can he be, I wonder? Well, we shall discover."

"You ride to Falmouth this morning?"

"We have an army to collect," he answered, gripping me not unkindly by the shoulder.

We rode into Falmouth side by side, Billy Priske following, by my father's command, and each with a red rose pinned to the flap of his hat. Upon the way we talked, mainly of the Trappist Brothers, and of Dom Basilio, who (it seemed) had at one time been an agent of the British legation at Florence, and in particular had carried my father's reports and instructions to and fro between Corsica and that city, avoiding the vigilance of the Genoese.

"A subtle fellow," was my father's judgment, "and, as I gave him credit, in the matter of conscience as null as Cellini himself: the last man in the world to turn religious. But the longer you live the more cause will you find to wonder at the divine spirit which bloweth where it listeth. Take these Methodists, who are to preach in Falmouth to-day. I have seen Wesley, and stood once for an hour listening to him. For aught I could discover he had no great eloquence. He said little that his audience might not have heard any Sunday in their own churches. His voice was hoarse from overwork, and

his manner by no means winning. Yet I saw many notorious ruffians sobbing about him like children: some even throwing themselves on the ground and writhing, like the demoniacs of Scripture. The secret was, he spoke with authority: and the secret again was a certain obtuseness—he appeared not to see those signs by which other men judge their neighbours or themselves to be past help. Or take these Trappists: Dom Basilio tells me that more than half of them are ex-soldiers and rough at that. To be sure I can understand why, having once turned religious, an old soldier runs to the Trappist rule. He has been bred under discipline, and has to rely on discipline. 'Tis what he understands, and the harder he gets it the more good he feels himself getting- ——"

We were nearing the town by the way of Arwennack, and just here a turn of the road brought us in sight of a whitewashed cottage and put a period to my father's discourse, as a garden gate flew open and out into the highway ran a lean young man with an angry woman in pursuit. His shoulders were bent and he put up both hands to ward off her clutch. But in the middle of the road she gripped him by the collar and caught him two sound cuffs on the nape of the neck.

She turned as we rode up. "The villain!" she

cried, still keeping her grip. "Oh, protect me from such villains!"

"But, my good woman," remonstrated my father, reining up, "it scarcely appears that you need protecting. Who is this man?"

"A thief, your honour! Didn't I catch him prowling into my garden? And isn't it for him to say what his business was? I put it to your honour" —here she caught the poor wretch another cuff— "what honest business took him into my garden, and me left a widow-woman these sixteen years?"

"Ai-ee!" cried the accused, still shielding his neck and cowering in the dust—a thin, ragged windle-straw of a youth, flaxen-headed, hatchet-faced, with eyes set like a hare's. "Have pity on me, sirs, and take her off!"

"Let him stand up," my father commanded. "And you, sir, tell me—What were you seeking in this good woman's garden?"

"A rose, sir—hear my defence!—a rose only, a small rose!" His voice was high and cracked, and he flung his hands out extravagantly. "Oh, York and Lancaster—if you will excuse me, gentlemen—that I should suffer this for a mere rose! The day only just begun too! And why, sirs, was I seeking a rose? Ay, there's the rub." He folded his arms dramatically and nodded at the woman. "There's

the gall and bitterness, the worm in the fruit, the peculiar irony—if you'll allow me to say so—of this distressing affair. Listen, madam, if I wanted a rose of you, 'twas for your whole sex's sake: your sex's, madam—every one of whom was, up to five or six months ago, the object with me of something very nearly allied to worship."

"Lord help the creature!" cried the woman. "What's he telling about? And what have you to do with my sex, young man? which is what the Lord made it."

"It is *not*, madam. Make no mistake about it: 'twere blasphemy to think so. But speaking generally, what I—as a man—have to do with your sex is to protect it."

"A nice sort of protector you'd make!" she retorted, planting her knuckles on her hips and eyeing him contemptuously.

"I am a beginner, madam, and have much to learn. But you shall not discourage me from protecting you, though you deny me the rose which was to have been my emblem. Every woman is a rose, madam, as says the poet Dunbar—

> "Sweet rose of vertew and of gentilness,
> Richest in bonty and in bewty clear
> And every vertew that is werrit dear,
> Except only that ye are merciless——

"You take me? 'Merciless,' madam?"

"I don't understand a word," said she, puzzled and angry.

"He was a Scotsman: and you find it a far cry to Loch Awe. Well, well—to resume—

"Into your garth this day I did pursue——

by 'garth' meaning 'garden': a good word, and why the devil it should be obsolescent is more than I can tell you——"

But here my father cut him short. "My good Mrs. Ede," said he, turning to the woman, "I believe this young man intended no harm to you and very little to your garden. You are quits with him at any rate. Take this shilling, step inside, and choose him a fair red rose for the price and also in token of your forgiveness, while he picks up his hat which is lying yonder in the dust."

"Hey?" The youth started back, for the first time perceiving the badges in our hats. "Are you too, sirs, of this company of the rose?" His face fell, but with an effort he recovered himself and smiled.

"You are not disappointed, I hope?" inquired my father.

"Why—to tell you the truth, sir—I had looked for a rendezvous of careless jolly fellows. For

cavaliers of your quality it never occurred to me to bargain." He held up a flap of his ragged coat and shook it ruefully.

My father frowned. "And I, sir, am disappointed. A moment since I took you for an original; but it appears you share our common English vice of looking at the world like a lackey."

"I, sir?" The young man waved a hand. "I an original? Give me leave to assure you that this island contains no more servile tradesman. Why, my lord—for I take it I speak to a gentleman of title——?"

"Of the very humblest, sir. I am a plain knight bachelor."

The original cringed elaborately, rubbing his hands. "A title is a title. Well, sir, as I was about to say, I worship a lord, but my whole soul is bound up in a ledger: and hence (so to speak) these tears: hence the disreputable garb in which you behold me. If I may walk beside you, sir, after this good woman has fetched me the rose—thank you, madam—and provided me with a pin from the *chevaux de frise* in her bodice—and again, madam, I thank you: you wear the very cuirass of matronly virtue—I should enjoy, sir, to tell you my history. It is a somewhat curious one."

"I feel sure, sir"—my father bowed to him

from the saddle—"it will lose nothing in the telling."

The young man, having fastened the rose in his hat, bade adieu to his late assailant with a bow; waved a hand to her; lifted his hat a second time; turned after us and, falling into stride by my father's stirrup, forthwith plunged into his story.

The Travels of Phineas Fett

"My name, sir, is Phineas Fett——"

He paused. "I don't know how it may strike you: but in my infant ears it ever seemed to forbode something in the Admiralty—a comfortable post, carrying no fame with it, but moderately lucrative. In wilder flights my fancy has hovered over the Pipe Office (Addison, sir, was a fine writer; though a bit of a prig, between you and me)."

"There was a Phineas Pett, a great shipbuilder for the Navy in King Charles the Second's time. I believe, too, he had a son christened after him, who became a commissioner of the Navy."

"You don't say so! The mere accident of a letter . . . but it proves the accuracy of our childish instincts. A commissionership—whatever the duties it may carry—would be the very thing, or a storekeepership, with a number of ledgers: it being un-

derstood that shipping formed my background, in what I believe is nautically termed the offing. I know not what exact distance constitutes an offing. My imagination ever placed it within sight and sufficiently near the scene of my occupation to pervade it with an odour of hemp and tar."

He paused again, glanced up at my father, and—on a nod of encouragement—continued:

"The nuisance is, I was born in the Midlands—to be precise, at West Bromicheham—the son of a well-to-do manufacturer of artificial jewellery. The only whiff of the brine that ever penetrated my father's office came wafted through an off-channel of his trade. He did an intermittent business in the gilding of small idols, to be shipped overseas and traded as objects of worship among the negroes of the American plantations. Jewellery, however, was his stand-by. In the manufacture of meretricious ware he had a plausibility amounting to genius, in the disposing of it a talent for hard bargains; and the two together had landed him in affluence. Well, sir, being headed off my boyhood's dream by the geographical inconvenience of Warwickshire—for a lad may run away to be a sailor, sir, but the devil take me if ever I heard of one running off to be a supercargo, and even this lay a bit beyond my ambition—I recoiled upon a passion to enter my father's

business and increase the already tidy patrimonial pile.

"But here comes in the cross of my destiny. My father, sir, had secretly cherished dreams of raising me above his own station. To him a gentleman—and he ridiculously hoped to make me one—was a fellow above working for his living. He scoffed at my enthusiasm for trade, and at length he sent for me and in tones that brooked no denial commanded me to learn the violin.

"Never shall I forget the chill of heart with which I received that fatal mandate. I have no ear for music, sir. In tenderer years indeed I had made essay upon the jew's harp, but had relinquished it without a sigh.

"'The violin!' I cried, though the words choked me. 'Father, anything but that! If it were the violoncello, now——'

"But he cut me short in cold incisive accents. 'The violin, or you are no son of mine.'

"I fled from the house, my home no longer. On the way to the front-door I had sufficient presence of mind, and no more, to make a *détour* to the larder and possess myself of the longest joint; which my heated judgment, confusing temporal with linen measurement, commended to me as the most sustaining. It proved to be a shin of beef: unnutritious

except for soup (and I carried no tureen), useless as an object of barter. With this and two half-crowns in my pocket I slammed the front-door behind me and faced the future."

Mr. Fett paused impressively.

"And you call me an original, sir," he went on in accents of reproach; "me, who started in life with two half-crowns in my pocket, the conventional outfit for a career of commercial success!"

"They have carried you all the way to Falmouth!"

"The one of them carried me so far as to Coventry, sir: where, finding a fair in progress as I passed through the town, and falling in with three bridesmaids who had missed their wedding party in the crowd, I spent the other in treating them to the hobby-horses at one halfpenny a ride. Four halfpennies—there were four of us—make twopence, and two's into thirty are fifteen rides; a bold investment of capital, and undertaken (I will confess it) not only to solace the fair ones but to ingratiate myself with the fellow who turned the handle of the machine. To him I applied for a job. He had none to offer, but introduced me to a company of strolling players who (as fortune would have it) were on the point of presenting 'Hamlet' with a *dramatis personæ* decimated by Coventry ale. They cast me

for Polonius and some other odds and ends. You may remember, sir, that at one point the Prince of Denmark is instructed to 'enter reading.' That stage direction I caught at, and by a happy 'improvisation' spread it over the entire play. Not as Polonius only, but as Bernardo upon the midnight platform, as Osric, as Fortinbras, as the Second Gravedigger, as one of the odd players—always I entered reading. In my great scene with the Prince we entered reading together. They killed me, still reading, behind the arras; and at a late hour I supped with the company on Irish stew; for, incensed by these novelties, the audience had raided a greengrocer's shop between the third and fourth acts and thereafter rained their criticism upon me in the form of cabbages and various esculent roots which we collected each time the curtain fell.

"Every cloud, sir, has a silver lining. I continued long enough with this company to learn that in our country an actor need never die of scurvy. But I weary you with my adventures, of which indeed I am yet in the first chapter."

"You shall rehearse them on another occasion. But will you at least tell us how you came to Falmouth?"

"Why, in the simplest manner in the world. A fortnight since I happened to be sitting in the stocks, in the absurd but accursed town of Bovey Tracey in

Devonshire. My companion—for the machine discommodated two—was a fiddler, convicted (like myself) of vagrancy; a bottle-nosed man, who took the situation with such phlegm as only experience can breed, and sliced a sausage composedly under the commonalty's gaze. 'Good Lord,' said I to myself, eyeing him, 'and to think that he with my chances, or I with his taste for music, might be driving at this moment in a coach and pair!'

"'Sir,' said I, 'are you attached to that instrument of yours?' 'So deeply,' he answered, 'that, like Nero, I could fiddle if Bovey Tracey were burning at this moment.' 'You can perform on it creditably?' I asked. 'In a fashion to bring tears to your eyes,' he answered me, and offered to prove his words. 'Not for worlds,' said I; 'but it grieves me to think how Fortune distributes her favours.' I told him of my father. 'I should like to make the acquaintance of such a man,' said he. 'You shall,' said I; and, fetching a pencil and a scrap of paper out of my pocket, I wrote as follows:

"'*To Mr. Jonathan Fett, Manufacturer of Flams, W. Bromicheham.*

The Public Stocks, Bovey Tracey, Devon.
June 21st (longest day).

DEAR FATHER,—Adopt bearer, in lieu of

Your affectionate son,

PHINEAS.'

"The fiddler at first suspected a jest: but on my repeated assurances took the letter thankfully, and at parting, on our release, pressed on me the end of his sausage wrapped in a piece of newspaper. I ate the sausage moodily and was about to throw the paper away when my eye caught sight of an advertisement in the torn left-hand corner. I read it, and my mind was made up. I am here, and (thanks to you, sir) with a rose in my hat."

By the time Mr. Fett concluded his narrative we had reached the outskirts of the town and found ourselves in a traffic which, converging upon the Market Strand from every side-street and alley, at once carried us along with it and constrained us to a walking pace. My father, finding the throng on the Market Strand too dense for our horses, turned aside to the Three Cups Inn across the street, gave them over to the ostler, and led us upstairs to a window which overlooked the gathering.

The Market Strand at Falmouth is an open oblong space, not very wide, leading off the main street to the water's edge, and terminating in steps where as a rule the watermen wait to take off passengers to the packets. A lamp-post stands in the middle of it, and by the base of this the preachers—a grey-headed man and two women in ugly bonnets—were already assembled, with but a foot or two dividing

them from the crowd. Close behind the lamp-post stood a knot of men conversing together—one of whom stepped forward for a word with the grey-headed preacher. He wore a rose in his hat, and at sight of him my heart gave a wild incredulous leap. It was Nat Fiennes!

I pushed past my father and flung the open window still wider. The grey-haired preacher had opened the Bible in his hand and was climbing the stone base of the lamp-post when a handful of filth struck the back of the book and bespattered his face. I saw Nat whip out his sword and swing about angrily in the direction of the shot, while the two women laid hands on either arm to check him; and at the same moment my father spoke up sharply in my ear.

"Tumble out, lad," he commanded. "We are in bare time."

I vaulted over the window-ledge and dropped into the street; my father after me, and Mr. Fett and Billy close behind. Indeed, that first shot had but given the signal for a general engagement; and, as we picked ourselves up and thrust our way into the crowd, a whole volley of filth bespattered the group of Methodists. In particular I noted the man with whom Nat Fiennes, a minute since, had been conversing—a little bald-headed fellow of about fifty-

five or sixty, in a suit of black which, even at thirty paces distant, showed rusty in the sunshine. An egg had broken against his forehead, and the yellow of it trickled down over his eyes; yet he stood, hat in hand, neither yielding pace nor offering to resist. Nat, less patient, had made a rush upon the crowd, which had closed around and swallowed him from sight. By its violent swaying he was giving it something to digest. One of the two women shrank terrified by the base of the lamp-post. The other—a virago to look at, with eyes that glared from under the pent of her black bonnet—had pulled the grey-headed preacher down by his coat-tails, and, mounting in his room, clung with an arm around the lamp-post and defied the persecutors.

"Why am I here, friends?" she challenged them. "O generation of vipers, why am I here? Answer me, you men of Belial—you, whose fathers slew the prophets! Because I glory to suffer for the right; because to turn the other cheek is a Christian's duty, and as a Christian woman I'll turn it though you were twice the number, and not be afraid what man can do unto me."

Now my father was well known in Falmouth and pretty generally held in awe. At sight of him advancing, the throng fell back and gave us passage in a sudden lull which reached even to where Nat

Fiennes struggled in the grasp of a dozen longshoremen who were haling him to the quay's edge, to fling him over. He broke loose, and before they could seize him again came staggering back, panting and dishevelled.

"Prosper!" he cried, catching sight of me, and grinning delightedly all over his muddied face. "I knew you would come! And your father, too?—splendid, lad, splendid!"

"Ye men of Falmouth"—the woman by the lamp-post lifted her voice more shrilly—"what shall I testify of the hardness of your hearts? Shall I testify that your Mayor, sending his crier round, has threatened to whip us through Falmouth streets at the cart-tail? Shall I testify——"

But here my father lifted a hand. "Gently, madam; gently. I am not defending his Worship if he issued any such proclamation; but 'tis an ancient punishment for scolds, and I advise you to lend him no colour of excuse."

"And who may *you* be, sir?" she demanded, looking down, angry, but checked in spite of herself by my father's air of authority.

"One," he answered, "who has come to see fair play, and who has—as you may see—for the moment some little influence with this rabble. I will continue to exert it while I can, if you on your part

will forbear to provoke; for the tongue, madam, has its missiles as well as the hands."

"I thank you, sir," said the grey-headed preacher, stepping forward and thrusting a book into my father's hands. "We had best begin with a hymn, I think. I have some experience of the softening power of music on these occasions."

"We will sing," announced the woman, "that beautiful hymn beginning, 'Into a world of ruffians sent.' Common metre, my friends, and Sister Tresize will give the pitch:

"Into a world of ruffians sent,
I walk on hostile ground——"

My father bared his head and opened the hymn-book; the rest of us, bareheaded too, ranged ourselves beside him; and so we stood facing the mob while the verses were sung in comparative quiet. The words might be provocative, but few heard them. The tune commanded an audience, as in Cornwall a tune usually will. The true secret of the spell, however, lay in my father's presence and bearing. A British crowd does not easily attack one whom it knows as a neighbour and born superior; and it paid homage now to one who, having earned it all his life, carelessly took it for granted.

"Begad, sir," said Mr. Fett in my ear, "and the

books say that the feudal system is dead in England! Why, here's the very flower of it! Damme, though, the old gentleman is splendid; superlative, sir; it's ten to one against Coriolanus, and no takers. Between ourselves, Coriolanus was a pretty fellow, but talked too much. Phocion, sir? Did I hear you mention Phocion?"

"You did not," I answered.

"And quite right," said he; "with your father running, I wouldn't back Phocion for a place. All the same," Mr. Fett admitted, "this is what Mr. Gray, of Peterhouse, Cambridge, would call a fearful joy, and I'd be thankful for a distant prospect of the way out of it."

"Indeed, sir"—my father, overhearing this, turned to him affably—"you touch the weak spot. For the moment I see no way out of the situation, nor any chance but to prolong it; and even this," he added, "will not be easy unless the lady on the lamp-post sensibly alters the tone of her discourse."

Indeed, at the conclusion of the singing she had started again to address the crowd, albeit—acting on my father's hint—in more moderate tones, and even, as I thought, somewhat tepidly. Her theme was what she called convictions of sin, of which by her own account she had wrestled with a surprising quantity; but in the rehearsal of them, though fluent, she

seemed to lose heart as her hearers relaxed their attention.

"Confound the woman!" grumbled my father. "She had done better, after all, to continue frantic. The crowd came to be amused, and is growing restive again."

"Sir," interposed Mr. Fett, "give me leave to assure you that an audience may be amused and yet throw things. Were this the time and place for reminiscences, I could tell you a tale of Stony Stratford (appropriately so-called, sir), where, as Juba in Mr. Addison's tragedy of 'Cato,' for two hours I piled the Pelion of passion upon the Ossa of elocutionary correctness, still without surmounting the zone of plant life; which in the Arts, sir, must extend higher than geographers concede. And yet I evoked laughter; from which I may conclude that my efforts amused. The great Demosthenes, sir, practised declamation with his mouth full of pebbles—for retaliatory purposes, I have sometimes thought."

Here my father, who had been paying no attention to Mr. Fett's discourse, interrupted it with a sharp but joyful exclamation; and, glancing towards him, I saw his face clear of anxiety.

"We are safe," he announced quietly, nodding in the direction of the Three Cups. "What we wanted was a fool, and we have found him."

CHAPTER VIII

TRIBULATIONS OF A MAYOR

Like the Mayor of Falmouth, who thanked God when the Town Jail was enlarged.—*Old Byword.*

His nod was levelled at a horseman who had ridden down the street and was pressing upon the outskirts of the crowd: and this was no less a dignitary than the Mayor of Falmouth, preceded on foot by a beadle and two mace-bearers, all three of them shouting "Way! Make way for the Mayor!" with such effect that in less than half a minute the crowd had divided itself to form a lane for them.

"Eh? eh? What is this? What is the meaning of all this?" demanded his Worship magisterially, as, having drawn rein, he fumbled in his tail pocket, drew forth a pair of horn spectacles, adjusted them on his nose, and glared round upon the throng.

"That, sir," answered my father stepping forward, "is what we are waiting to learn."

"Sir John Constantine?" The Mayor bowed from his saddle. "You will pardon me, Sir John, that for the moment I missed to recognise you. The

fact is, I suffer, Sir John, from some—er—shortness of sight: a grave inconvenience, at times, to one in my position."

"Indeed?" said my father gravely. "And yet, as I have heard, 'tis a malady most incident to borough magistrates."

"You don't say so?" The Mayor considered this for a moment. "The visitations of Providence are indeed inscrutable, Sir John. It would give me pleasure to discuss them with you, on some—er—more suitable occasion, if I might have the honour. But as I was about to say, I am delighted to see you, Sir John: your presence here will strengthen my hands in dealing with this—er—unlawful assembly."

"*Is* this an unlawful assembly?" my father asked.

"It is worse, Sir John; it is far worse. I have been studying the law, and the law admits of no dubiety. It is unlawful assembly where three or more persons meet together to carry out some private enterprise in circumstances calculated to excite alarm. Mark those words, Sir John—'some private enterprise.' When the enterprise is not private but meant to redress a public grievance, or to reform religion, the offence becomes high treason."

"Does the law indeed say so?"

"It does, Sir John. The law, let me tell you, is

very fierce against any reforming of religion. Nay more, Sir John, under the first of King George the First, statute two—I forget what chapter—by the Act commonly called the Riot Act, it is enacted that if a dozen or more go about reforming of religion or otherwise upsetting the public peace and refuse to go about their business within the space of one hour after I tell 'em to, the same becomes felony without benefit of clergy."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Billy Priske, pulling off his hat and eyeing the rose in its band.

"And further," his Worship continued, "any man wearing the badge or ensign of the rioters shall himself be considered a rioter without benefit of clergy."

All this while the crowd had been pressing closer and closer upon us, under compulsion (as it seemed) of reinforcements from the waterside, the purlieus of the Market Strand being, by now, so crowded that men and women were crying out for room. At this moment, glancing across the square, I was puzzled to see a woman leaning forth from a first-floor window and dropping handfuls of artificial flowers upon the heads of the throng. While I watched, she retired—her hands being empty—came back with a band-box, and scattered its contents broadcast, pausing to blow a kiss towards the Mayor.

I plucked my father's sleeve to call his attention

to this; but he and the Mayor were engaged in argument, his Worship maintaining that the Methodists—and my father that their assailants—were the prime disturbers of the peace.

"And how, pray," asked my father, "are these poor women to disperse, if your ruffians won't let 'em?"

"As to that, sir, you shall see," promised the Mayor, and turned to the town crier. "John Sprott, call silence. Make as much noise about it as you can, John Sprott. And you, Nandy Daddo, catch hold of my horse's bridle; here."

He rose in his stirrups and, searching again in his tail-pocket, drew forth a roll of paper.

"Silence!" bawled the crier.

"Louder, if you please, John Sprott: louder, if you can manage it! And say 'in the name of King George,' John Sprott; and wind up with 'God save the King.' For without 'God save the King' 'tis no riot, and a man cannot be hanged for it. So be very particular to say 'God save the King,' John Sprott, and put 'em all in the wrong."

John Sprott bawled again, and this time achieved the whole formula.

"That's better, John Sprott. And you—" his Worship turned upon the Methodists, "you just listen to this, now:

" Our sovereign Lord the King——"

Here, as the Methodists stood before him with folded hands, a lump of filth flew past the Mayor's ear and bespattered the lamp-post.

" Damme, who did that? " his Worship demanded. " John Sprott, who threw that muck? "

" I don't know the man's name, your Worship: but he's yonder, there, in a striped shirt open at the neck, with a little round hat on the back of his head; and, what's more, I see'd him do it."

" Then take down his description, John Sprott, and write that at the words ' Our sovereign Lord ' he shied a lump of muck."

John Sprott pulled out a note-book and entered the offence.

" And after ' muck,' John Sprott, write ' God save the King.' I don't know that 'tis necessary, but you'll be on the safe side." His Worship unfolded the proclamation again, cleared his throat, and resumed:

" Our sovereign Lord the King chargeth and commandeth all persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves and peaceably to depart to their habitations or to their lawful business, upon the pains contained in the Act made in the first year of George the First for preventing——"

A handful of more or less liquid mud here took

him on the nape of the neck and splashed over the paper which he held in both hands.

"Arrest that man!" he shouted, bouncing about in a fury. At the same moment my father gripped my elbow as a volley of missiles darkened the air, and we fell back—all the company of the Rose—shoulder to shoulder, to protect the Methodists, as a small but solid phalanx of men came driving through the crowd with mischief in their faces.

"But wait awhile! wait awhile!" called out Billy Priske, as my father plucked out his sword. "These be no enemies, master, to us or the Methodies, but honest sea-fardingers—packet-men all--and, look you, with roses in their hats!"

"Roses? Faith, and so they have!" cried my father, lowering his guard. "But what the devil, then, is the meaning of it?"

He was answered on the moment. The official whom his Worship called Nandy Daddo had made a rush into the crowd, charging it with his mace as with a battering-ram, and was in the act of clutching the man who had thrown the filth, when the phalanx of packet-men broke through and bore him down. A moment later I saw his gold-laced hat fly skimming over the heads of the throng, and his mace wrenched from him and held aloft in the hands of a red-faced man, who flourished it twice and rushed upon the

Mayor, shouting at the same time with all his lungs: "Townshends! This way, Townshends!" whereat the packet-men cheered and pressed after him, driving the crowd of Falmouth to right and left.

Clearly what mischief they meant was intended for the Mayor: and the Mayor, for a short-sighted man, detected this very promptly. Also he showed surprising agility in tumbling out of his saddle; which he had scarcely done before the crupper resounded with a whack, of which one of the borough maces bears an eloquent dent to this day.

The Mayor, catching his toe in the stirrup as he slipped off, staggered and fell at our feet. But the body of his horse, interposed between him and the rioters, protected him for an instant, and in that instant my father and Nat Fiennes dragged him up and thrust him to the rear while we faced the assault. For now, and without a word said, the Methodists were forgotten, and we of the Rose were standing for law and order against this other company of the Rose, of whose quarrel we knew nothing at all.

Our attitude indeed, and the sight of drawn swords (to oppose which they had no weapons but short cudgels), appeared to take them aback for the moment. The press, however, closing on us, as we backed to cover the Mayor's retreat, offered less and

less occasion for sword-play; and, the seamen still advancing and outnumbering us by about three to one, the whole affair began to wear an ugly look.

At this juncture relief came to us in the strangest fashion. I had clean forgotten the little Methodist man in black; whom, to be sure, I had no occasion to remember but for the quiet resolution of his carriage as he had stood with the burst egg trickling over his face. But now, to the surprise of us all, he sprang forward upon the second mace-bearer, snatched the mace from his hand and laid about him in a sudden frenzy; at the first blow, delivered unawares, catching the ringleader on the crown and felling him like an ox. For a second, perhaps, he stared, amazed at his own prowess, and with that the lust of battle seized him.

He rained blows; yet with cunning, running forth and back into our ranks as each was delivered; and between the blows he capered, uttering shrill, inarticulate cries. This diversion indeed saved us. For the rabble, pressing up to see the fun, left a space more or less clear on the far side of the Market Strand, and for this space we stampeded, dragging the Mayor along with us.

The next thing I remember was fighting side by side with Nat before a door beneath the window where I had seen the woman throwing down her

handfuls of artificial flowers. The lower windows were barred, but the door stood open; and we fought to defend it whilst my father lifted the Mayor of Falmouth by his coat-collar and the seat of his breeches and flung him inside. Then we too backed and, ducking indoors under the arms of the little man in black—who stood on the step swinging the borough mace as though to scythe off the head of any one who approached within five feet of it—seized him by the coat-tails, dragged him inside and, slamming-to the door (which shut with two flaps), locked and bolted it and leant against it with all our weight.

Yet a common house-door is but a flimsy barricade against a mob, especially if that mob be led by five-and-twenty stout-bodied seamen. We had shut it merely to gain time, and when the cudgels outside began to play tattoo upon its upper panels I looked for no more than a minute's respite at the best.

It puzzled me therefore when—and immediately upon two ugly blows that had well-nigh shaken the lock from its fastenings—the shouting suddenly subsided into a confused hubbub of voices, followed by a clang and rattle of arms upon the cobblestones. This last sound appeared to hush the others into silence. I stood listening, with my hip pressed against the lock to hold it firm against the next concussion. None came: but presently some one rapped

with his knuckles on the upper panel and a voice, authoritative but civil enough, challenged us in the name of King George to open.

To this I had almost answered bidding him go to the devil, when a damsel put her head over the stair-rail of the landing above and called down to us to obey and open at once: and, looking up in the dim light of the passage, I recognised her for the one who had scattered the flowers, just now, to the rioters.

"Excuse me," said I, "but how shall I know you are not playing us a trick?"

"My good child," she replied, "open the door and don't stand arguing. The riot is over and the square full of military. The person who knocks is Captain Bright of the Pendennis Garrison. If you don't believe me, step upstairs here and look out of window."

"My father—" I began.

"Your father is right enough, and so is that fool of a Mayor—or will be when he has drunk down a glass of cordial."

Nevertheless I would not obey her until I had sent Nat Fiennes upstairs to look; who within a minute called over the stair-head that the woman told the truth and I had my father's leave to open. Thereupon I pulled open the upper flap of the door, and stood blinking at a tall officer in gorgeous regimentals.

"Hullo!" said he. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" said I. "And forgive me that I kept you waiting."

"Don't mention it," said he very affably. "My fault entirely, for coming late; or rather the Mayor's, who sent word that we weren't needed. I took the liberty to doubt this as soon as my sentries reported that a couple of boats' crews were putting ashore from the *Townshend* packet: and here we are in consequence. Got him safe?"

"The Mayor?" said I. "Yes, I believe he is upstairs at this moment, drinking brandy-and-water and pulling himself together."

The Captain grinned amiably. "Sorry to disturb him," said he: "but the mob is threatening to burn his house, and I'd best take him along to read the Riot Act and put things ship-shape."

"He has read it already, or some part of it."

"Some part of it won't do. He must read the whole proclamation, not forgetting 'God save the King.'"

"If you can find the paper," said I, "there's a lump of mud on it, marking the place where he left off."

The Captain grinned again. "I doubt he'll have to begin afresh after breaking off to drink brandy-and-water with Moll Whiteaway. For a chief mag-

istrate that will need some explaining. And yet," mused the Captain as he stepped into the passage, "you may have done him a better turn than ever you guessed; for, when the mob sees the humour of it, belike it'll be more for laughing than setting fire to his house."

"But who is Moll Whiteaway?" I asked.

He stared at me. "You mean to say you didn't know?" he asked slowly. "You didn't bring him here for a joke?"

"A joke?" I echoed. "A mighty queer joke, sir, you'd have thought it, if your men had been five minutes earlier."

He leaned back against the wall of the passage. "And you brought him here *by accident*? Well, if this don't beat cock-fighting!"

"But who is this Moll Whiteaway?" I repeated.

The question again seemed to take his breath away. For answer he could only point to a small brass plate in the lower flap of the door; and, stooping, I read: *Miss Whiteaway, Milliner, Modes and Robes.*

"Oh!" said I. "That accounts for the band-box of flowers."

"Does it?" he asked.

"She flung them out of window to the packet-men."

"Which, doubtless, seemed to you an everyday proceeding—just a milliner's usual way of getting rid of her summer stock. My good young sir, did you ever hear tell of a 'troacher'? Nay, spare that ingenuous blush: Moll is a loose fish, but I mean less than your modesty suspects. A 'troacher' is a kind of female smuggler that disposes of the goods the packet-men bring home in their bunks; and Moll Whiteaway is the head of the profession in Falmouth. Now our worthy Mayor took oath the other day to put down this smuggling on board the packets; and he began yesterday with the *Townshend*. He and the Port Searcher swept the ship, sir. They dug Portuguese brandy in kegs out of the seamen's beds and parcels of silk out of the very beams. They shook two case-bottles out of the chaplain's breeches, which must have galled him sorely in his devotions. They netted close on two hundred pounds worth of contraband in the fo'c's'le alone——"

"Good Heavens!" I interjected. "And as the riot began he was calling himself short-sighted!"

Captain Bright laughed, clapped me on the shoulder, and led the way upstairs, where (strange to say) we found the Mayor again deploring his defective vision. He lay in an easy chair amid an army of band-boxes, bonnet-stands, and dummies representing the female figure; and sipped Miss Whiteaway's

brandy while he discoursed in broken sentences to an audience consisting of that lady, my father, Nat Fiennes, Mr. Fett, and the little man in black (who, by the way, did not appear to be listening, but stood and pondered the borough mace, which he held in his hands, turning it over and examining the dents).

"It is a great drawback, Sir John—a great drawback," his Worship lamented. "A man in my position, sir, should have the eye of an eagle; instead of which on all public occasions I have to rely on John Sprott. My good woman"—he turned to Miss Whiteaway—"would you mind taking a glance out of window and telling me what has become of John Sprott?"

"He's down below under protection of the soldiers," announced Miss Whiteaway; "and no harm done but his hat lost and his gown split up the back."

"I shall never have the same confidence in John Sprott. He takes altogether too sanguine a view of human nature. Why, only last November—you remember the great gale of November the first, Sir John? I was very active in burying the poor bodies brought ashore next day and for several days after; for, as you remember, a couple of Indymen dragged their anchors and broke up under Pendennis Battery: and

John Sprott said to me in the most assured way, 'The town'll never forget your kindness, sir. You mark my words,' he said, 'this here action will stand you upon the pinnacles of honour till you and me meets, if I may respectfully say it, and sits us down in the land of marrow and fatness.' After that you'd have thought a man might count on some popularity. But what happened? A day or two later—that is to say, on November the fifth—I was sitting in my shop with a magnifying-glass in my eye, cleaning out a customer's watch, when in walked half a dozen boys carrying a man's body between 'em. You could tell that life was extinct by the way his head hung back and his legs trailed limp on the floor as they brought him in, and his face looked to me terribly swollen and discoloured. 'Dear, dear!' said I. 'What? Another poor soul? Take him up to the mortewary, that's good boys,' I said; 'and you shall have twopence apiece out of the poor-box.' How d'ye think they answered me? They bust out a-laughing, and cries one: 'If you please, sir, 'tis meant for *you*! 'Tis the fifth of November, and we'm goin' to burn you in effigy.' I chased 'em out of the shop, and later on in the day I spoke to John Sprott about it. 'Well, now,' said John Sprott, 'I passed a lot of boys just now, burning a guy at the top of the Moor, and I had my suspicions; but the thing hadn't a

feature of yours to take hold on, barrin' the size of its feet.' And that's what you call popularity!" wound up the Mayor with bitterness. "That's what a man gets for rising early and lying down late to serve his country!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Mayor," put in Captain Bright, "but they are threatening to burn worse than your effigy: in fact I heard some talk of setting fire to your house and shop. Nay," he went on as the Mayor bounced up to his feet, "there's no real cause for alarm. I have sent on my lieutenant with fifty men to keep the mob on the move, and have stationed a dozen outside here to escort you home."

"The Riot Act—where's my Riot Act?" cried his Worship, searching his pockets desperately. "I never read out 'God save the King,' and without 'God save the King' a man may burn all my valybles and make turbulent gestures and show of arms, and harry and murder to the detriment of the public peace, and refuse to move on when requested, and all the time in the eyes of the law be a babe unborn. Where's the Riot Act, I say? for without it I'm a lost man and good-bye to Falmouth!"

"Then 'tis lucky that I came provided with a copy." Captain Bright produced a paper from the breast of his tunic.

The Mayor took it with trembling hands and read.

"Why, 'tis a duplicity!" he cried. "A very duplicity! and, what's more, printed in the same language word for word!" He caught the mace from the little man in black. "Lead the way, Captain: lead the way: and blessings on the man that first invented duplicities!"

CHAPTER IX

I ENLIST AN ARMY

If I be not ashamed of my soldiers, I am a soused gurnet.
—*Sir John Falstaff.*

My father turned to me as they descended the stair. "This is all very well, lad," said he, "but we have yet to find our army. After the murder of Julius Cæsar, now——"

"I did enact Julius Cæsar once," quoted Mr. Fett in parenthesis. "I was killed i' the capitol; Brutus killed me."

My father frowned. "After the murder of Julius Cæsar, when the mob for two days had Rome at their mercy, I have read somewhere that two men appeared out of nowhere, and put themselves at the head of the rioters. None knew them; but so boldly they comported themselves, heading the charges, marshalling the ranks, here throwing up barricades, there plucking down doors and gates, breaking open the prisons, and setting fire to private houses, that presently the whisper spread they were Castor and Pollux; till, at length, falling into the hands of the

ædiles, these *dioscuri* were found to be two poor lunatics escaped from a house of detention. If we could discover another such pair among the mob, now!"

"We are wasting time here for certain," said I. "And where, by the way, is Billy Priske?"

"If you waste your time upstairs here, gentlemen," said Miss Whiteaway, "belike you may do better in the parlour, where I had prepared for some friends of mine with two-three chickens and a ham."

"Ah, to be sure!" said I; "the packet-men."

"Never you worry, young sir," she answered tartly, "so long as they don't mind eating after their betters. And as for your man Priske, I saw him twenty minutes ago escape towards Church Street with the Methodists."

"Hang it!" put in Nat Fiennes, "if I hadn't clean forgotten the Methodists!"

"We left them scurvily," said I, "every Jack and Jill of them but our friend here." I nodded towards the little man in black. "And he not only saved himself, but was half the battle."

The little man seemed to come out of himself with a start, and gazed from one to another of us perplexedly.

"Excuse me, gentlemen." He drew himself up

with dignity. "Do my ears deceive me, or are you mistaking me for a Methodist?"

"Indeed, and are you not, sir?" asked my father.

"Why, good God, gentlemen!—if you'll excuse me—but I'm the parish clerk of Axminster!"

My father recovered himself with a bow. "In Devon?" he asked gravely, after a pause in which our silence paid tribute to the announcement.

"In Devon, sir; a county remarkable for its attachment to the principles of the Church of England. And that I should have lived to be mistaken for a Methodist!"

"But, surely, John Wesley himself is a Clerk in Holy Orders? and, I have heard, a great stickler for the Church's authority."

"He may say so, sir," answered the little man darkly. "He may say so. But, if he means it, why does he go about encouraging such a low class of people? A man, sir, is known by the company he keeps."

"Is that in the Bible?" my father inquired. "I seem to remember, on the contrary, that in the matter of consorting with publicans and sinners——"

"It won't work, sir. It has been tried in Axminster before now, and you may take my word for it that it won't work. You mustn't suppose, gentlemen," he went on, including us all in the argument,

"you mustn't take me for one of those parrot-Christians who just echo what they hear in the pulpits on Sundays. I *think* about these things; and I find that your extreme doctrines may do all very well for the East and for hot countries where you can go about half-naked and nobody takes any notice; but the Church of England, as its name implies, is the only Church for England. A truly Christian Church, gentlemen, because it selects its doctrines from the Gospels; and English, sir, to the core, because it selects 'em with a special view to the needs of our beloved country. And what (if I may so put it) is the basis of that selection? The same, sirs, which we all admit to be the basis of England's welfare and the foundation of her society; in other words, the land. The land, gentlemen, is solid; and our reformed religion (say what you will, I am not denying that it has, and will ever have, its detractors) is the religion for solid Englishmen."

My father put out a hand and arrested Mr. Fett, who had been regarding the speaker with joyful admiration, and at this point made a movement to embrace him.

"I must have his name!" murmured Mr. Fett. "He shall at least tell us his name!"

"Badcock, sir; Ebenezer Badcock," answered the little man, producing a black-edged visiting-card.

"But," urged my father, "you must forgive us, Mr. Badcock, if we find it hard to reconcile your conduct this morning with these sentiments, on which, for the moment, I offer no comment except that they are admirably expressed. What song the Sirens sang, Mr. Badcock, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, are questions (as Sir Thomas Browne observes) not beyond conjecture, albeit the Emperor Tiberius posed his grammarians with 'em. But when a man openly champions street-preaching, and goes on to lay about him with a mace——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Badcock with sudden eagerness. "And what—by the way, sir—did you think of that performance?"

"Why, to be sure, you behaved valiantly."

The little man blushed with pleasure. "You really think so? It struck you in that light, did it? Well, now I am glad—yes, sir, and proud—to hear that opinion; because, to tell you the truth, I thought it pretty fair myself. The fact is, gentlemen, I wasn't altogether sure what my behaviour would be at the critical moment. You may deem it strange that a man should arrive at my time of life without being sure whether he's a coward or a brave man; but Axminster—if you knew the place—affords few opportunities for that sort of thing."

"Allow us to reassure you, then," said my father. "But there remains the question, why you did it?"

Mr. Badcock rubbed his hands. "Appearances were against me, I'll allow," he answered with a bashful chuckle; "but you may set it down to tchivalry. We all have our weaknesses, I hope, sir; and tchivalry is mine."

"Chivalry?" echoed my father.

"You spell it with an 's'? Excuse me; whatever schooling I have picked up has been at odd times; but I am always open to correction, I thank the Lord."

"But why call it a weakness, Mr. Badcock?"

"Call it a hobby; call it what you like. *I* look upon it as a debt, sir, due to the memory of my late wife. An admirable woman, sir, and by name Artemisia; which, I have sometimes thought, may partially account for it. Allow me, gentlemen." He drew a small shagreen case from his breast-pocket, opened it, and displayed a miniature.

"Her portrait?"

"In a sense. As a matter of fact, I will not conceal from you, gentlemen, that it came to me in the form of a pledge—that being my late profession—and I have never been able to trace the original. But, as I said when first I showed it to the late Mrs. B., 'My dear, you might have sat for it.' A well-

developed woman, gentlemen, though in the end she went out like the snuff of a candle, that being the way sometimes with people who have never known an hour's sickness. 'Am I really like that, Ebenezer?' she asked. 'In your prime, my dear,' said I —she having married me late in life owing to her romantic nature—'in your prime, my dear, I'll defy any one to tell you and this party from two peas.' 'I wish I knew who she was,' said my wife. 'Hadn't you best leave well alone?' said I; 'for I declare till this moment I hadn't dreamed that another such woman as yourself existed in the world, and it gives me a kind of bigamous feeling which I can't say I find altogether unpleasant.' 'Then I'll keep the thing,' says she very positively, 'until the owner turns up and redeems it;' which he never did, being, as I discovered, a strolling portrait painter very much down on his luck. So there the mystery remained. But (as I was telling you), though a first-rate manager, my poor dear wife had a number of romantic notions; and often she has said to me after I'd shut up shop, 'If wishes grew on brambles, Ebenezer, it's not a pawnbroker's wife I'd be at this moment.' 'Well, my dear,' I'd say to soothe her, 'there *is* a little bit of that about the profession, now you come to mention it.' 'And there was a time,' she'd go on,

'when I dreamed of marryin' a red-cross knight!' 'I have my higher moments, Artemisia,' I'd say half in joke. 'Why not try shutting your eyes?' But afterwards, when that splendid woman was gone for ever, and my daughter Heeb (which is a classical name given her by her mother) comfortably married to a wholesale glover, and me left at home a solitary grandfather—which, proud as you may be of it, is a slight occupation—I began to think things over and find there was more in my poor wife's notions than I'd ever allowed. And the upshot was that seeing this advertisement by chance in a copy of the *Sherborne Messenger*, I determined to shut up shop and let Axminster think I was gone on a holiday, while I gave it a trial; for, you see, I was not altogether sure of myself."

"Excuse me, Badcock," interrupted Mr. Fett, advancing towards him with outstretched arms; "but have you perused the books of chivalry, or is this the pure light of nature?"

"Books, sir?" answered Mr. Badcock seriously. "I never knew there were any books about it. I never heard of tchivalry except from my late wife; and you'll excuse the force of habit, but she pronounced it the same as in chibbles."

"You never read of the meeting of Amadis and Sir Galaor?"

Mr. Badcock shook his head.

"Nor of Percival and Galahad, nor of Sir Balin and Sir Balan? No? Then embrace me!"

"Sir?"

"Embrace me!"

"Sit down, the pair of you," my father commanded. "I have a proposal to make, which, if I mistake not, will interest you both. Mr. Badcock, I have heard your aspirations, and can fulfil them in a degree that will surprise you. I like you, Mr. Badcock."

"The feeling, sir, is mutchual." Mr. Badcock bowed with much amiability.

"Is time an object with you?"

"None whatever, sir. I am on a holiday."

"Will you be my guest to-night?"

"With the more pleasure, sir, after my experience of the inns in these parts. Though I may have presented her to you in a somewhat romantic light, my Artemisia *did* know how to make a bed; and twenty-two years of her ministrations, not to mention her companionship, have coddled me in this particular."

"And you, sir"—my father turned to Mr. Fett—"will you accompany us?"

"With what ulterior object?" demanded Mr. Fett. "You will excuse my speaking as a business

man, and overlook the damned bad manners of the question for the sake of its appropriateness."

My father smiled. "Why, sir, I was proposing to invite you to a sea voyage with me."

"There was a time, before commerce claimed me, when the mere hint of a nautical expedition had evoked an emotion which, if it survive at all, lingers but as in a sea-shell the whisper of the parent ocean."

"As a supercargo, at four shillings *per diem*," suggested my father.

"Say no more, sir; I agree."

"As for Mr. Fiennes—nay, lad, I remember you well." My father turned to him with that sweet courtesy which few ever resisted. "And blush not, lad, if I guess that to you we all owe this meeting: 'twere a bravery well beseeming your blood. As for Mr. Fiennes, he will accompany us in heart if he cannot in presence—being, as I understand, destined for the law?"

"Why, sir, as for that," stammered Nat, "I have had the devil's own dispute with my father."

"You treated him with all respect, I hope?"

"With all the respect in the world, sir. But it scarcely matters, since he has cast me off, and without a penny."

"Why, then, you can come too!" cried my father, gripping him by the hand. "Bravo, Prosper! that

makes five; and with Billy Priske, when we can find him, six; and that leaves but one to find before dinner-time." He pulled out his watch. "Lord!" he cried, "and 'tis high time to feel hungry, too. If this lady now will repeat her hospitable offer——"

I thought at the moment, and I thought once or twice during the meal downstairs, that my father was taxing this poor woman's hospitality. I doubted that he, himself so carelessly hospitable, might forget to offer her payment; and lingered after the others had trooped into the passage, with purpose to remind him privately.

"Come," said he, and made a motion to leave, still without offering to pay. On the threshold I had almost turned to whisper to him when the woman came after and touched his arm.

"Nay, Sir John," said she eagerly in a low, hoarse voice, "let the lad hear me thank you. He is old enough to understand and clean enough to profit. Shut the door, child. You know me, Sir John?"

My father bent his head. "I never forget a face," said he quietly.

"Take notice of that, boy. Your father remembers me, whom to my knowledge he never saw but once, and then as a magistrate, when he sat to judge me. Never mind the offence, lad. I am a sinful woman, and the punishment was——"

"Nay, nay!" put in my father gently.

"The punishment was," she continued, hardening her voice, "to strip me to the waist and whip me in public. The law allowed this, and this they would have done to me. But your father, being chairman of the bench—for the offence lay outside the borough—would have none of it, and argued and forced three other magistrates to give way. Little good he did, you may say, seeing that my name is such in Falmouth that, only by entering my door, the Mayor just now did what all his cleverness could never have done—stopped a riot by a silly, brutal laugh—the chief magistrate taking shelter with Moll Whiteaway! You can't get below that for fun, as the folk will take it; and yet I say your father did good, for he saved me from the worst. And to-day of his goodness he has not remembered my sins, but treated me as though they were not; and to-day, as only a good man can, he goes from my house, no man thinking to laugh except at his simplicity, even though it were known that I kissed his hand. God bless you, Sir John, and teach your son to be merciful to women!"

My father was ever so shy of his own kind actions that, when detected by chance or painfully tracked out in one, he kept always a quotation ready to justify what pure impulse had prompted. So now,

as we hurried across the deserted Market Strand to catch up with the other three, he must needs brazen things out with the authority of Bishop Taylor.

"It was a maxim of that excellent divine," said he, "that Christian censure should never be used to make a sinner desperate; for then he either sinks under the burden or grows impudent and tramples upon it. A charitable, modest remedy (says he) preserves that which is virtue's girdle—fear and blushing. Honour, dear lad, is the peculiar counsellor of well-bred natures, and these are few; but almost in all men you will find a certain modesty towards sin, and were I a king my judges should be warned that their duty is to chasten; whereas by punishing immoderately they can but effect the exact opposite."

We found our trio waiting for us on the far side of the square; and, having fetched our horses and left an order at the inn for Billy Priske on his return to mount and follow us, wended our way out of the town. The streets on this side were deserted and mournful, the shopkeepers having fastened their shutters for fear of the mob, of whose present doings no sound reached us but a faint murmuring hubbub borne on the afternoon air from the north-east—that is, from the direction of the Green Bank and the Penryn Road.

My father led the way at a foot's pace, and seemed to ride pondering, for his chin was sunk on his chest, and he had pulled his hat-brim well over his eyes (but this may have been against the July sun). After him tramped Mr. Fett in eager converse with the little pawnbroker, now questioning him shrilly, now halting to regard him with mute ecstasy, in a trance of holy joy, as a man who has dug up a sudden treasure and for the moment can only gaze at it and hug himself. Nat and I brought up the rear, he striding at my stirrup and pouring forth the tale of his adventures since we parted. A dozen times he rehearsed the scene of the parental quarrel, and interrupted each rehearsal with a dozen anxious questions. Ought he to have given this answer?—to have uttered that defiance? Did I think he had shown self-control? Had he treated the old gentleman with becoming respect? Would I put myself in his place? Suppose it had been my own father, now——

"But yours, lad, is a father in a thousand," he broke off bitterly. "I had never a notion that father and son could be friends, as are you and he. He is splendid—splendid!"

I glanced at him quickly and turned my face aside, suspecting that he took my father for a madman, and was kindly concealing the discovery. Nevertheless I

hardened my voice to answer, "You will say so when you know him better. And my uncle Gervase runs him a good second."

"Faith, then, I wish you'd persuade your uncle to adopt me. I'm not envious, Prosper, in a general way, but your luck gives me a deuced orphanly feeling. Have I been over-hasty? That is the question; whether 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of accusing conscience or to up and have it out with the old man."

"Pardon me, gentlemen"—Mr. Fett wheeled about suddenly on the road ahead of us—"but it was by accident that I overheard you, and by a singular coincidence at that moment I happened to be discussing the same subject with Mr. Badcock here."

"What subject?"

"Missiles, sir. It appears that, when his blood is up, Mr. Badcock finds himself absolutely careless of missiles. He declares that, with a sense of smell as acute as most men's, he was unaware to-day of having been struck with a rotten egg until I, at ten paces' distance, drew his attention to it. Now that is a degree of courage—insensibility—call it what you will—to which I make no pretence. The cut and thrust, gentlemen, the couched lance, even (within limits) the battering-ram, would have (I feel confident) comparatively few terrors for me. But mis-

siles I abominate. Drawing, as I am bound to do, my anticipations of the tented field from experience gathered—I say it literally, gathered—before the footlights, I confess to some sympathy with the gentleman who assured Harry Percy that but for these vile guns he would himself have been a soldier. You will not misunderstand me. I believe on my faith that as a military man I was born out of my time. The scythed chariots of Boadicea, for instance, must have been damned inconvenient; yet I can conceive myself jumping 'em. But a stone, as I learnt in my boyhood—a stone, sirs, and *a fortiori* a bullet——"

"Hist!" broke in my father, at the same moment reining up. "Prosper, what do you make of that noise up yonder?"

I listened. "It sounds to me, sir, like a heavy cart——"

"Or a waggon. To my hearing there are two horses."

"And runaway ones, by the shouting."

We had reached a point of the road (not far from home) where a steep lane cut across it: a track seldom used but scored with old ruts, sunk between hedges full sixteen feet high, leading down from a back gate of Constantine and a deserted lodge to a quay by the waterside. Not once in three months, within my remembrance, did cart or waggon pass

along this lane, which indeed grew a fine crop of grass and docks between the ruts.

"Nay," said my father after a few seconds, "I gave you a false alarm, gentlemen. The shouting, whatever it means, is over. Your pardon, Mr. Fett, that I interrupted you."

"Nay, sir," said Mr. Fett, stepping past him to reconnoitre the lane, "I was but remarking what a number of the wise have observed before me, that a stone which has left the hand is in the hands of the dev——"

He ducked his head with a cry as a stone whizzed past and within a foot of it. On the instant the loud rattle and thunder of cartwheels broke forth again, and now but a short distance up the lane; also a voice almost as loudly vociferating; and, almost before Mr. Fett could run back to us, a whole volley of stones flew hurtling across the road.

"Hi, there! Halt!" My father struck spur and rode forward, in time to catch at and check the leader of two horses slithering down-hill tandem-fashion before the weight of a heavy cart. "Confound you, sir! What the devil d'you mean by flinging stones in this manner across the middle of the King's highway?"

The man—he was one of the seamen of the *Gauntlet*—stood up in the cart upon a load of stones and

grinned. In one hand he gripped the reins, in the other a fistful of flints.

"Your honour's pardon," said he, lifting his forearm and drawing the back of it across his dripping brow, "but the grey mare for'rad won't pull, and the whip here won't reach her. I couldn't think upon no better way."

"You mean to tell me you have been pelting that poor brute all down the lane?"

"I couldn't think upon no better way," the seaman repeated wistfully, almost plaintively. "She's what you might call sensitive to stones."

"Intelligent beast!" commented Mr. Fett.

"And I bought that mare only six months ago!" In truth my father had found the poor creature wandering the roads and starving, cast off by her owner as past work, and had purchased her out of mere humanity for thirty shillings.

"But what business have you to be driving my cart and horses?" he demanded. "And what's the meaning of these stones you're carting?"

"Ballast, your honour."

"Ballast?"

"I don't know how much of it'll ever arrive at this rate," confessed the seaman, dropping the handful of flints and scratching his head. "'Tis buying speed at a terrible cost of jettison. But Cap'n

Pomery's last order to me was to make haste about it if we're to catch to-morrow's tide."

"Captain Pomery sent you for these stones?"

"Why, Lord love your honour, a vessel can't discharge two dozen Papist monks and cattle and implements to correspond without wantin' *something* in their place. Nice flat stones, too, the larger-sized be, and not liable to shift in a sea-way."

But here another strange noise drew our eyes up the lane, as an old man in a smock frock—a pensioner of the estate, and by name John Worthyvale—came hobbling round the corner and down the hill towards us, using his long-handled road hammer for a staff and uttering shrill, tremulous cries of rage.

"Vengeance, Sir John! Vengeance for my l'il heap o' stones!"

"Why, Worthyvale, what's the matter?" asked my father soothingly.

"My l'il heap o' stones, Sir John; my poor l'il heap o' stones! What's to become o' me, master? Where will your kindness find a bellyful for me, if these murderin' seamen take away my l'il heap o' stones?"

My father laid a hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Captain Pomery wants them for ballast, Worthyvale. You understand? It appears he can find none so suitable."

"No, I don't understand!" exclaimed the old fellow fiercely. "This has been a black week for me, Sir John. First of all my darter's youngest darter comes and tells me she've picked up with a man. Seems 'twas only last year she was runnin' about in short frocks; but dang it! the time must ha' slipped away somehow whilst I've a-sat hammerin' stones, an' now there'll be no person left to mind me. Next news, I hear from Master Gervase that you be goin' foreign, Sir John, with Master Prosper here. The world gets that empty, I wish I were dead, I do. An' now they've a-took my l'il heap o' stones!"

"And this old man's sires," said my father to me, but so that he did not hear, "held land in Domesday Book—twelve virgates of land with close on forty carucates of arable, villeins and borderers and bondservants, six acres of wood, a hundred and twenty of pasture; and he makes his last stand on this heap of stones. Ballast?" He turned to the seaman. "Did I not tell Captain Pomery to ballast with wine?"

"We were carrying it all the forenoon," the seaman answered. "There was two hogsheads of claret."

"And the hogshead of Madeira, with what remained of the brown sherry? Likewise in bottles

twelve dozen of the Hermitage and as much again of the Pope's wine, of Avignon?"

"It all went in, sir. Master Gervase checked it on board by the list."

"For the rest we are reduced to stones? Then, Prosper, there remains no other course open to us."

"Than what, sir?" I asked.

"We must enlist this old man; and that fulfils our number."

"Old John Worthyvale?" I laughed, incredulous.

"Why not? He can sit in the hold and crack stones until I devise his part in the campaign. Say no more. I have an inkling he will prove not the least useful man of our company."

"As to that, sir," I answered with a shrug of the shoulders and a glance at Mr. Fett and Mr. Badcock, "I don't feel able to contradict you."

"Then here we are assembled," said my father cheerfully, with the air of one closing a discussion; "the more by token that here comes Billy Priske. Why, man," he asked as Billy rode up—but so dejectedly that his horse seemed to droop its ears in sympathy—"what ails you? Not wounded, are you?"

"Worse," answered Billy, and groaned.

"We were told you got quit of the crowd."

"So I did," said Billy. "Damn it!"

"They followed you?" I asked.

"No, they didn't, and I wish they had."

"Then what on earth has happened?"

"What has happened?" Having no hair of his own to speak of, Billy reached forward and ran his fingers through his horse's mane. "I've engaged to get married. That's what has happened."

"Good Lord!"

"To a female Methody, in a Quaker bonnet. I had no idea of any such thing when I followed her. She was sittin' on the first milestone out of Falmouth and jabbin' her heel into the dust, like a person in a pet. First of all, when I spoke to her, she wouldn't tell what had annoyed her; but later on it turned out she had come expectin' to be made a martyr of, and everything was lookin' keenly that way until Sir John came and interfered, as she put it."

"And she said," suggested Mr. Fett, "that she didn't mind what man could do unto her?"

"The very words she used, sir!" said Billy, his brow clearing as a prisoner's will when counsel supplies him with a defence.

"And, when you took her at her word, like a Christian woman she turned the other cheek?"

"She did, sir, and no harm meant; but just doing it gay, as a man will."

"But when you explained this, she wouldn't take no for an answer?"

"She would not, sir. She seemed not to understand. Then I looked at her bonnet and, a thought striking me, I tried 'nay' instead. But that didn't work no better than the other. If you could hide me for to-night, Sir John——"

"You had best sleep aboard the *Gauntlet* to-night," said my father. "If the woman calls I will have a talk with her. What is her name, by the way?"

"Martha."

"But I mean her full name."

"I didn't get so far as to inquire, Sir John. But the point is, she knows mine."

CHAPTER X

OF THE DISCUSSION HELD ON BOARD THE *GAUNTLET*

The Pilot assured us that, considering the Gentleness of the Winds and their pleasant Contentions, as also the Clearness of the Atmosphere and the Calm of the Current, we stood neither in Hope of much Good nor in Fear of much Harm . . . and advised us to let the Ship drive, nor busy ourselves with anything but making good Cheer.—*The Fifth Book of the Good Pantagruel.*

It appeared that, unknown to me, my father had already made his arrangements with Captain Pomery, and we were to sail with the morning's tide. During supper—which Billy Priske had no sooner laid than he withdrew to collect his kit and carry it down to the ship, taking old Worthyvale for company—our good Vicar arrived, as well to bid us good-bye as in some curiosity to learn what recruits we had picked up in Falmouth. I think the sight of them impressed him: but at the tale of our day's adventures, and especially when he heard of our championing the Methodists, his hands went up in horror.

"The Methodists!" (For two years past the Vicar had occupied a part of his leisure in writing a

pamphlet against them: and by "leisure" I mean all such days as were either too inclement for fishing, or thunderous so that the trout would not rise.)

"My dear friend, while you have been sharpening the sword of St. Athanasius against 'em, the rabble has been beforehand with you and given 'em bloody noses. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of heresy—if you call the Wesleyans heretics—as well as of the Church."

The Vicar sighed. "I have been slack of pace and feeble of will. Yes, yes, I deserve the reproach."

My father laid a hand on his shoulder. "Tut, tut! Cannot you see that I was not reproaching, but rather daring to commend you for an exemplar? There is a slackness which comes of weak will; but there is another and a very noble slackness which proceeds from the two strongest things on earth, confidence and charity; charity, which naturally inclines to be long-suffering, and confidence, which, having assurance in its cause, dares to trust that natural inclination. Dissent in the first generation is usually admirable and almost always respectable: men don't leave the Church for fun, but because they have thought and discovered (as they believe) something amiss in her—something which in nine cases out of ten she would be the better for considering. But dissent in the second and third generation usually

rests on bad temper, which is not admirable at all, though often excusable because the Church's persecution has produced it. Believe me, my dear Vicar, that if all the bishops followed your example and slept on their wrath against heresy, they would wake up and find nine-tenths of the heretics back in the fold. Indeed I wish your good lady would let you pack your nightcap and come with us. You could hire a curate over from Falmouth."

"Could I write my pamphlet at sea?"

"No: but, better still, by the time you returned the necessity for it would be over."

The Vicar smiled. "*You* counsel lethargy?—you, who in an hour or two start for Corsica, and with no more to-do than if bound on a picnic!"

"Ay, but for love," answered my father. "In love no man can be too prompt."

"I believe you, sir," hiccupped Mr. Fett, who had been drinking more than was good for him. "And so, begad, does your man Priske. Did any one mark, just now, how like a shooting star he glided in the night from Venus's eye? Love, sir?" he turned to me. "The tender passion? Is that our little game? Is *that* the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium? O Troy! O Helen! You'll permit me to add, with a glance at our friend Priske's predicament, O Dido! At five

shillings *per diem* I realise the twin ambitions of a life-time and combine the supercargo with the buck. Well, well, *cherchez la femme.*"

"You pronounce it 'share-shay'?" inquired Mr. Badcock. "Now I have seen it spelt the same as in 'church.'"

"The same as in ch——?" Mr. Fett fixed him with a glassy but reproachful eye. "Badcock, you are premature, premature and indelicate."

Here my father interposed and, heading the talk back to the Methodists, soon had the Vicar and the little pawnbroker in full cry—parson and clerk antiphonal, "matched in mouth like bells"—on church discipline; which gave him opportunity, while Nat and I at our end of the table exchanged the dear converse and dearer silences of friendship, to confer with my uncle Gervase and run over a score of parting instructions on the management of the estate, the ordering of the household, and, in particular, the entertainment of our Trappist guests. Perceiving with the corner of his eye that we two were restless to leave the table, he pushed the bottle towards us.

"My lads," said he, "when the drinking tires let the talk no longer detain you."

We thanked him, and with a glance at Mr. Fett—who had fallen asleep with his head on his arms—

stepped out upon the moonlit terrace. I waited for Nat to speak and give me a chance to have it out with him, if he doubted (as he must, methought) my father's sanity. But he gazed over the park at our feet, the rolling shadows of the woodland, the far estuary where one moonray trembled, and, stretching out both hands, drew the spiced night-air into his lungs with a sob. "O Prosper!"

"You are wondering where to find your room?" said I, as he turned and glanced up at the grey glimmering façade. "The simplest way is to pick up the first lantern you see in the hall, light it, walk upstairs, enter what room you choose, and take possession of its bed. You have five hours to sleep, if you need sleep. Or shall I guide you?"

"No," said he; "the first is the only way in this enchanted house. But I was thinking that by rights, while we are standing here, those windows should blaze with lights and break forth with the noise of dancing and minstrelsy. To such a castle, high against such a velvet night as this, would Sir Lancelot come, or Sir Gawain, or Sir Perceval, at the close of a hard day."

"Wait for the dawn, lad, and you will find it rather the castle overgrown with briers."

"And, in the heart of them, the Rose!"

"You will find no Sleeping Beauty, though you

hunt through all its rooms. She lies yonder, Nat, somewhere out beyond the sea there."

"In a few hours we sail to her. O Prosper, and we will find her! This is better than any dream, lad: and this is life!"

He gazed into my eyes for a moment in the moonlight, turned on his heel, and strode away from me towards the great door, which—like every door in the house—stood wide all the summer night. I was staring at the shadow of the porch into which he had disappeared, when my father touched my elbow.

"There goes a good lad," said he quietly.

"And my best friend."

"He has sobered down strangely from the urchin I remember on Winchester meads; and in the sobering he has grown exalted. A man might almost say," mused my father, "that the imp in him had shed itself off and taken flesh in that Master Fett I left snoring with his head on my dining-table. An earthy spirit, that Master Fett; earthy and yet somewhat inhuman. Your Nat Fiennes has the clue of life—if only Atropos do not slit it."

Here the Vicar came out to take his leave, winding about his neck and throat the comforter he always wore as a protective against the night-air. It appeared later that he was nettled by Mr. Badcock's collapsing beneath the table just as they had reached

No. XX. of the Thirty-nine Articles and passed it through committee by consent.

"God bless you, lad!" said he, and shook my hand. "In seeking your kingdom you start some way ahead of Saul the son of Kish. You have already discovered your father's asses."

He trudged away across the dewy park and was soon lost in the darkness. In the dim haze under the moon, having packed Mr. Badcock and Mr. Fett in a hand-cart, we trundled them down to the shore and lifted them aboard. They resisted not, nor stirred.

By three o'clock our dispositions were made and Captain Pomery professed himself ready to cast off. I returned to the house for the last time, to awake and fetch Nat Fiennes. As I crossed the wet sward the day broke and a lark sprang from the bracken and soared above me singing. But I went hanging my head, heavy with lack of sleep.

I tried five rooms and found them empty. In the sixth Nat lay stretched upon a tattered silk coverlet. He sprang up at my touch and felt for his sword.

"Past three o'clock and fine clear mornin'!" sang I, mimicking the Oxford watch, and with my foot the tap of his staff as he had used to pass along Holywell.

"Hey! now the day dawis,
The jolly cock crawis——

"The wind will head us in the upper reach: but beyond it blows fair for Corsica!"

He leapt to his feet and laughed, blithe as the larks now chorusing outside the window. But my head was heavy, and somehow my heart too, as we walked down to the shore.

My uncle Gervase stood on the grass-grown quay; my father on the deck. They had already said their good-byes. With his right hand my uncle took mine, at the same time laying his left on my shoulder; and said he—

"Farewell, lad. The rivers in Corsica be short and eager, as I hear; and slight fishing in them near the coast, the banks being overgrown. But it seems there are good trout, and in the mountain pools.

"Whether they be the same as our British trout I cannot discover. I desire you to make certain. Also if the sardines of those parts be the same as our Cornish pilchards, but smaller. Belike they start from the Mediterranean Sea and reach their full size on our coasts.

"The migrations of fishes are even less understood than those of the birds. Yet both (being annual) will teach you, if you consider them, to think

little of this parting. God knows, lad, how sorely I spare you.

"Do justice, observe mercy, and walk humbly before thy God. This if they should happen to make you king, as your father promises.

"They have an animal very like a sheep, but wilder and fiercer. If you have the luck to shoot one, I shall be glad of his skin.

"'Twill be a job here, making two ends meet. But as our Lord said, Sufficient for the day is its evil. I have put a bottle of tar-water in your berth.

"I have often wished to set eyes on the Mediterranean Sea. A sea without tides must be but half a sea—speaking with all respect to the Almighty, who made it.

"You will pick up the wind in the lower reach.

"There was a trick or two of fence I taught you aforetime. I had meant to remind you of 'em. But enough, lad. Shake hands . . . the Lord have you in His keeping!"

Good man! For a long while after we had thrust off from the quay, the two seamen in the cock-boat towing us, he stood there and waved farewells; but turned before we reached the river bend, and went his way up through the woods—since in Cornwall it is held unlucky to watch departing friends clean out of sight.

Almost at once I went below in search of my hammock, and there slept ten solid hours, by the clock; a feat of which I never witted until, coming upon deck, I rubbed my eyes to find no sight of land, but the sea all around us and Captain Pomery at the helm with the sun but a little above his right shoulder. The sky, but for a few fleeced clouds, was clear; a brisk north-westerly breeze blew steady on our starboard quarter, and before it the ketch ran with a fine hiss of water about her bluff bows. My father and Nat were stretched with a board between them on the deck by the foot of the mizzen, deep in a game of chequers: and, without disturbing them, I stepped amidships where Mr. Fett lay prone on his belly, his chin propped on both hands, in discourse with Billy and Mr. Badcock, who reclined with their backs against the starboard bulwark.

"Tut, man!" said Mr. Fett cheerfully, addressing Billy. "You have taken the right classical way with her: think of Theseus and Ariadne, Phaon and Sappho. . . . We are back in the world's first best age; when a man, if he wanted a woman to wife, sailed in a ship and abducted her, as did the Tyrian sea-captain with Io daughter of Inachus, Jason with Medea, Paris with Helen of Greece; and again, when he tired of her, left her on an island and sailed away. There was Sappho, now; she ran and cast

herself off a rock. And Medea, she murdered her children in revenge. But we are over-hasty, to talk of children."

Billy groaned aloud, "I meant no harm to the woman."

"Nor did these heroes. As I was saying, on board this ship I find myself back in the world's dawn, ready for any marvels, but responsible (there's the beauty of it) only to my ledger. As supercargo I sit careless as a god on Olympus. My pen is trimmed, my ink-pot filled, and my ledger ruled and prepared for miracles. *Item*, a Golden Fleece. *Item*, a king's runaway daughter, slightly damaged:

> "Whatever befell the good ship *Argo*,
> It didn't affect the supercargo,

who whistled and sat composing blank verse, having discovered that Jason rhymed most unheroically with bason:

> "Neglecting the daughter of Æson,
> Sat Jason, a bason his knees on——"

"You don't help a man much, sir, so far as I understand you," grumbled Billy, with a nervous glance around the horizon.

"Well, then I'll prescribe you another way. Nobody believes me when I tell the following story: but 'tis true nevertheless. So listen:

Mr. Fett's Story of the Interrupted Betrothal

"To the south of the famous city of Oxford, between it and the town of Abingdon, lies a neat covert called Bagley Wood: in the which, on a Sunday evening a bare two months ago, I chose to wander with my stage copy of Mr. Otway's 'Orphan'—a silly null play, sirs, if not altogether the nonsense for which Abingdon, two nights later, condemned it. While I wandered amid the undergrowth, conning my part, my attention was arrested by a female voice on the summer breeze, most pitiably entreating for help. I closed my book and bent my steps in the direction of the outcries. Judge of my amazement when, parting the bushes in a secluded glade, I came upon a distressed but not uncomely maiden, buried up to her neck in earth beneath the spreading boughs of a beech. To exhume and release her cost me, unprovided as I was with any tool for the purpose, no little labour. At length, however, I disengaged her and was rewarded with her story; which ran, that a faithless swain, having decoyed her into the recesses of the wood, had pushed her into a pit prepared by him; and that but for the double accident of having miscalculated her inches and being startled by my recitations of Otway into a terror that the

whole countryside was after him with hue and cry, he had undoubtedly consummated his fell design. After cautioning her to be more careful in future I parted from the damsel (who to the last protested her gratitude) and walked homeward to my lodgings, on the way reflecting how frail a thing is woman when matched against man the libertine."

Billy Priske's eyes had grown round in his head. Mr. Badcock, after sitting in thought for a full minute, observed that the incident was peculiar in many respects.

"Is that the end of the yarn?" I asked.

"I never met the lady again," confessed Mr. Fett. "As for the story," he added with a sigh, "I am accustomed to have it disbelieved. Yet let me tell you this. On my return I related it to the company, who received it with various degrees of incredulity —all but a youthful stroller who had joined us at Banbury and earned promotion, on the strength of his looks, from 'walking gentleman' to what is known in the profession as 'first lover.' On the strength of this, again, he had somewhat hastily aspired to the hand of our leading tragedy lady—a mature person, who knew her own mind. My narrative seemed to dispel the atmosphere of gloom which had hung about him for some days; and the next morning, having promised to accompany his be-

trothed on a stroll up the river-bank, he left the inn with a light, almost jaunty, tread. From the balcony I watched them out of sight. By and by, however, I spied a figure returning alone by the towpath; and, concealing myself, heard young Romeo in the courtyard carelessly demanding of the ostler the loan of a spade. From behind my curtain I watched him as again he made his way up the shore with the implement tucked under his arm. I waited in a terrible suspense. Each minute seemed an hour. A thunderstorm happening to break over the river at this juncture (as such things do), the scene lacked no appropriate accessory of menace. At length, between two flashes of lightning, I perceived in the distance my two turtles returning, and gave voice to my relief. They were walking side by side, but no longer arm-in-arm. Young Romeo hung his head dejectedly: and on a closer view the lady's garments not only dripped with the storm but showed traces of earth to the waist. The rest they kept to themselves. I say no more, save that after the evening's performance (of 'All for Love') young Romeo came to me and announced that his betrothal was at an end. They had discovered (as he put it) some incompatibility of temper."

My father and Nat Fiennes had finished their game and come forward in time to hear the conclu-

sion of this amazing narrative. Billy Priske stared at his master in bewilderment.

"A spade!" growled Billy, mopping his brow and letting his gaze travel around the horizon again before settling, in dull wrath, on Mr. Fett. "What's the use, sir, of makin' a man feel like a villain and puttin' thoughts into his head without means to fulfil 'em?"

"Sit you quiet," said my father, "while I try to drive Mr. Fett's story out of your head with an honester one."

"About a spade, master?"

"There is a spade in the story. In the year 1416 a certain Portuguese sea-captain, Gonsalvez Zarco by name, and servant of the famous Henry of Portugal, was cruising homeward in a leaky caravel from a baffled voyage in search of the Fortunate Islands. He had run into a fog off Cape Blanco in Africa, and had been pushing through it for two days when the weather lifted and the look-out spied a boat, empty but for one man, drifting a mile and more to leeward. Zarco ran down for the boat, and the man, being brought aboard, was found to be an escaped Moorish prisoner on his way back to Spain. He gave his name as Morales, and said that he had sometime been a pilot of Seville, but, being captured by the Moors off Algeçiras, had spent close on twenty

years in servitude to them. In the end he and six other Christians had escaped in a boat of their own making, but with few victuals. When these were consumed his companions had perished one by one, horribly, and he had been sailing without hope, not caring whither, for a day and a night before his rescue come.

"Now this much he told them painfully, being faint with fasting and light-headed: but, afterwards falling into a delirium, he let slip certain words that caused Captain Zarco to bestow him in a cabin apart and keep watch over him until the ship reached Lagos, whence he conveyed him secretly and by night to Prince Henry, who dwelt at that time in an arsenal of his own building, on the headland of Sagres. There Prince Henry questioned him, and the old man, taken by surprise, told them a story both true and wonderful.

"In his captivity he had made friends with a fellow-prisoner, an Englishman named Prince or Prance (since dead, after no less than thirty years of servitude), who had fallen among the Moors in the manner following. In his youth he had been a seaman, and one day in the year 1370 he was standing idle on Bristol Quay when a young squire accosted him and offered to hire him for a voyage to France, naming a good wage and pressing no small

share of it upon him as earnest-money. The ship (he said, naming her) lay below at Avonmouth and would sail that same night. Prince knew the ship and her master, and judged from the young squire's apparel and bearing that here was one of those voluntary expeditions by which our young nobles made it a fashion to seek fame at the expense of our enemies the French; a venture dangerous indeed but carrying a hopeful chance of high profits. He agreed, therefore, and joined the ship a little after nightfall. Towards midnight arrived a boat with our young squire and one companion, a lady of extreme beauty, who had no sooner climbed the ship's side than the master cut the anchor-cable and stood out for sea.

"The names of these pretty runaways were Robert Machin and Anne d'Arfet, wife of a sour merchant of Bristol; and all their care was to flee together and lose all the world for love. But they never reached France; for, having run prosperously down Channel and across from the Land's End until they sighted Ushant, they met a north-easterly gale which blew them off the coast; a gale so blind and terrible and persistent that for twelve days they ran before it, in peril of death. On the thirteenth day they sighted an island, where, having found (as they thought) good anchorage, they brought the ship to,

and rowed the lady ashore through the surf. Between suffering and terror she was already close upon death.

"Now this man Prince said that though the seamen laid their peril at her door, holding the monstrous storm to be a judgment direct from Heaven upon her sin, yet not one of them, considering her childish beauty, had the heart to throw her an ill word or so much as an accusing look; but, having borne her ashore, they built a tabernacle of boughs and roofed it with a spare sail for her and for her lover, who watched beside her till she died.

"On the morning of her death the seamen, who slept on the beach at a little distance, were awakened by a terrible cry: whereat gazing seaward—as a seaman's first impulse is—they missed all sight of their ship. Either the gale, reviving, had parted her moorings and blown her out to sea, or else the two or three left on board had treacherously slipped her cable. At all events, no more was ever heard of her.

"The seamen supposed then that Master Machin had called out for the loss of the ship. But, coming to him, they found him staring at the poor corpse of his lady; and when they pointed to sea he appeared to mark not their meaning. Only he said many times, 'Is she gone? Is she gone?' Whether he spoke of the ship or of the lady they could not tell.

Thereafter he said nothing, but turned his face away from all offers of food, and on the fifth day the seamen buried him beside his mistress and set up a wooden cross at their heads.

"After this (said Prince), finding no trace of habitation on the island, and being convinced that no ship ever passed within sight of it, the seamen caught and killed four of the sheep which ran wild upon the cliffs, and with the flesh of them provisioned the boat in which they had come ashore, and took their leave. For eleven days they steered as nearly due east as they could—that being the quarter in which they supposed the mainland to lie, until a gale overtook them, and, drowning the rest, cast four of them alive on the coast near Mogador, where the Moors fell on them and sold them into slavery, to masters living wide apart. Yet, however the others perished, in the mouth of this one man the story lived and came after many days to ears that understood it.

"For Prince Henry, hearing the pilot's tale, believed verily that this must be the island for which his sea-captains had been searching, and in 1420 sent Zarco forth again to seek it, with the old man on board. They reached Porto Santo, where they heard of a dark line visible in all clear weather on the southern horizon, and, sailing for it through the fogs, came to a marshy cape, and beyond this cape to high

wooded land which Morales recognised at once from his fellow-prisoner's description. Yes, and, bringing them to shore, he led them, unerring, to the wooden cross above the beach; and there, over the grave of these lovers, Zarco took seizin of the island in the name of King John of Portugal, Prince Henry, and the Order of Christ.

"From this," my father concluded, "we may learn, first, that human passion, of all things the most transient, may be stronger and more enduring than death; of all things the unruliest and most deserving to be chastened, it may rise naked from the scourge to claim the homage of all men; nay, that this mire in which the multitude wallows may on an instant lift up a brow of snow and challenge the Divinity Himself, saying, 'We are of one essence. Shall not I too work miracles?' Secondly——"

"Your pardon, master," put in Billy, "but in all the fine speeches about Love and War and suchlike that I've heard you read out of books afore now, I could never make out what use they be to common fellows like myself. Say 'tis a battle: you start us off with a shout, which again starts off our betters a-knocking together other folks' heads and their own: but afterwards, when I'm waiting and wondering what became of Billy Priske, all the upshot is that some thousand were slaughtered and maybe enough

to set some river running with blood. Likewise with these seamen, that never ran off with their neighbours' wives, but behaved pretty creditable under the circumstances, which didn't prevent their being spilt out of boats and eaten by fishes or cast ashore and barbecued by heathen Turks—a pretty thing this Love did for them, I say. And so to come to my own case, which is where this talk started, I desire with all respect, master, that you will first ease my mind of this question—be I in love, or bain't I?"

"Surely, man, *you* must know that?"

Billy shook his head. "I've what you might call a feeling t'wards the woman: and yet not rightly what you might call a feeling, nor yet azactly, as you might say, t'wards her. And it can't be so strong as I reckoned, for when she spoke the word 'marriage' you might ha' knocked me down with a straw."

"Eh?" put in Mr. Fett, "was she the first to mention it?"

"Me bein' a trifle absent-minded, maybe, on that point," explained Billy. His gaze at this point, happening to wander to the wheel, encountered Captain Jo Pomery's; and Captain Jo, who had been listening, nodded encouragement.

"Speakin' as a seafarin' man and the husband o'

three at one time and another," said he, "they always do so."

"My Artemisia," said Mr. Badcock, "was no exception; though a powerful woman and well able to look after herself."

"'Tis their privilege," agreed Captain Pomery. "You must allow 'em a few."

"But contrariwise," Billy resumed, "it must be stronger than I reckoned, for here I be safe, as you may say, and here I should be grateful; whereas I bain't, and, what's more, my appetite's failin'. Be you goin' to give me something for it?" he asked, as Mr. Badcock dived a hand suddenly into a tail pocket and drew forth what at first appeared to be the neck of a bottle, but to closer view revealed itself as the upper half of a flute. A second dive produced the remainder.

"Good Lord! Badcock has another accomplishment!" ejaculated Mr. Fett.

"The gift of music," said Mr. Badcock, screwing the two portions of the instrument together, "is born in some. The great Batch—John Sebastian Batch, gentlemen—as I am credibly informed, composed a fugue in his bed at the tender age of four."

"He was old enough to have given his nurse warning," said Mr. Fett.

"With me," pursued Mr. Badcock modestly, "it

has been the result of later and (I will not conceal the truth, sirs) more assiduous cultivation. This instrument"—he tapped it affectionately—"came to me in the ordinary way of trade and lay unredeemed in my shop for no less than eight years; nor when exposed for sale could it tempt a purchaser. 'You must do something with it,' said my Artemisia—an excellent housewife, gentlemen, who wasted nothing if she could help it. I remember her giving me the same advice about an astrolabe, and again about a sun-dial corrected for the meridian of Bury St. Edmund's. 'My dear,' I answered, 'there is but one thing to be done with a flute, and that is to learn it.' In this way I discovered what I will go no further than to describe as my Bent."

Mr. Badcock put the flute to his lips, and blew into it. A tune resulted.

"But," persisted Billy Priske after a dozen bars or so, "the latest thing to be mentioned was my appetite: and 'tis wonderful to me how you gentlemen are lettin' the conversation stray, this afternoon."

"The worst of a flute," said Mr. Badcock, withdrawing it from his lips with obvious reluctance, "and the objection commonly urged by its detractors, is that a man cannot blow upon it and sing at the same time."

"I don't say," said Billy seriously, "as that

mayn't be a reas'nable objection; only it didn't happen to be mine."

"You have heard the tune," said Mr. Badcock. "Now for the words—

> "I attempt from love's sickness to fly, in vain,
> Since I am myself my own fever and pain."

"Bravo!" my father cried. "Mr. Badcock has hit it. You are in love, Billy, and beyond a doubt."

"Be I?" said Billy, scratching his head. "Well, as the saying is, many an ass has entered Jerusalem."

CHAPTER XI

WE FALL IN WITH A SALLEE ROVER

We laid them aboard the larboard side—
With hey! with ho! for and a nonny no!
And we threw them into the sea so wide,
And alongst the Coast of Barbary.
—*The Sailor's Onely Delight.*

My father, checked in the midst, or rather at the outset, of a panegyric upon love, could not rest until he had found an ear into which to deliver it; but that same evening, after the moon had risen, drew Nat aside on the poop, and discharged the whole harangue upon him; the result being that the dear lad, who already fancied himself another Rudel in quest of the Lady of Tripoli, spent the next two days in composing these verses, the only ones (to my knowledge) ever finished by him:

NAT FIENNES' SONG TO THE UNDISCOVERED LADY

Thou, thou, that art
My port, my refuge, and my goal,
I have no chart,
No compass but a heart
Trembling t'wards thee and to no other pole.

My star! Adrift
On seas that well-nigh overwhelm,
Still when they lift
I strain towards the rift,
And steer, and hold my courage to the helm.

With ivory comb,
Daylong thou dalliest dreaming where
The rainbow foam
Enisles thy murmuring home:
Home too for me, though I behold it ne'er!

Yet when the bird
Is tirèd, and each little wave,
Aloft is heard
A call, reminds thee gird
Thy robe and climb to where the summits rave:

Yea, to the white
Lone sea-mark shaken on the verge—
"What of the night?"
Ah, climb—ah, lift the light!
Ah, lamp thy lover labouring in the surge!

Fray'd rope, burst sail,
Drench'd wing, as moth towards the spark—
I fetch, I fail,
Glad only that the gale
Breaks not my life upon the brutal dark.

Be it frost or fire,
Thy bosom, I believed it warm:
I did aspire
For that, and my desire—
Burn thou or freeze—fought thro' and beat the storm.

Thou, thou, that art
My sole salvation, fixed, afar,
I have no chart,
No compass but a heart
Hungry for thee and for no other star.

"Humph!" said I, by way of criticism, when these verses were shown to me. "Where be the mackerel lines, Captain Jo? There's too much love-talk aboard this ship of yours."

"Mackerel?" said Captain Jo. "Why, where's your bait?"

"You shall lend me an inch off your pipe-stem," said I, and, to tease Nat, began to hum the senseless old song:

She has ta'en a siller wand
An' gi'en strokës three,
An' chang'd my sister Masery
To a mack'rel of the sea.
And every Saturday at noon
The mack'rel comes to me,
An' she takes my laily head
An' lays it on her knee,
An' kames it wi' a kame o' pearl,
An' washes it i' the sea——

"Mackerel?" said Captain Pomery. "If ye found one fool enough to take hold at the rate we're sailing, ye'd pull his head off."

"Why, then, he would be off his head," answered

I: "and there are plenty here to make him feel at home."

In truth I was nettled; jealous, as a lad in his first friendship is quick to be. Were not Nat and I of one age? Then why should he be leaving thoughts we might share, to think of woman? I had chafed at Oxford against his precocious entanglements. Here on shipboard his propensity was past a joke; with no goose in sight to mistake for a swan, he must needs conjure up an imaginary princess for his devotion. What irritated most of all was his assuming, because I had not arrived at his folly, the right to treat me as a child.

South and across the Bay of Biscay the weather gave us a halcyon passage; the wind falling lighter and lighter until, within ten leagues of Gibraltar, we ran into a flat calm, and Captain Pomery's face began to show his vexation.

The vexation I could understand—for your seaman naturally hates calm weather—but scarcely the degree of it in a man temperamentally so placid. Hitherto he had taken delight in the strains of Mr. Badcock's flute. Suddenly, and almost pettishly, he laid an embargo on that instrument, and moreover sent word down to the hold, and commanded old Worthyvale to desist from hammering on the ballast. All noise, in fact, appeared to irritate him.

Mr. Badcock pocketed his flute in some dudgeon, and for occupation fell to drinking with Mr. Fett; whose potations, if they did not sensibly lighten the ship, heightened, at least, her semblance of buoyancy with a deck-cargo of empty bottles. My father put no restraint upon these topers.

"Drink, gentlemen," said he; "drink by all means so long as it amuses you. I had far rather you exceeded than that I should appear inhospitable."

"Magnifshent old man," Mr. Fett hiccupped to me confidentially, "*an'* magnifshent liquor. As the song shays—I beg your pardon, the shong says—able 'make a cat speak an' man dumb—

> "Like 'n old courtier of the queen's
> An' the queen's old courtier—

Chorus, Mr. Bawcock, *if* you please, an', by the way, won't mind my calling you Bawcock, will you? Good Shakespearean word, bawcock: euphonious, too—

> "Accomplisht eke to flute it and to sing,
> Euphonious Bawcock bids the welkin ring."

"If," said Mr. Badcock in an injured tone and with a dark glance aft at Captain Pomery, "if a man don't *like* my playing, he has only to say so. I don't press it on any one. From all I ever heard, art is a matter of taste. But I don't understand a man's

being suddenly upset by a tune that, only yesterday, he couldn't hear often enough."

Out of the little logic I had picked up at Oxford I tried to explain to him the process known as *sorites*; and suggested that Captain Pomery, while tolerant of *I attempt from Love's sickness to fly* up to the hundredth repetition, might conceivably show signs of tiring at the hundred-and-first. Yet in my heart I mistrusted my own judgment, and my wonder at the skipper's conduct increased when, the next dawn finding us still becalmed, but with the added annoyance of a fog that almost hid the bowsprit's end, his demeanour swung back to joviality. I taxed him with this, in my father's hearing.

"I make less account of fogs than most men," he answered. "I can smell land; which is a gift and born with me. But this is no weather to be caught in anywhere near the Sallee coast; and if we're to lose the wind, let's have a good fog to hide us, I say."

He went on to assure us that the seas hereabouts were infested with Moorish pirates, and to draw some dismal pictures of what might happen if we fell in with a prowling Sallateen.

With all his fears he kept his reckoning admirably, and we half-sailed, half-drifted through the Strait, and so near to the Rock of Gibraltar that, passing

within range of it at the hour of reveille, we heard the British bugles sounding to us like ghosts through the fog. Captain Pomery here was in two minds about laying-to and waiting for a breeze; but a light slant of wind encouraged him to carry the *Gauntlet* through. It bore us between the invisible, narrow Strait, and for a score of sea-miles beyond; then, as casually as it had helped, it deserted us.

Day broke and discovered us with the Moorish coast low on our starboard horizon. To Mr. Fett and Mr. Badcock this meant nothing, and my father might have left them to their ignorance had he not in the course of the forenoon caught them engaged upon a silly piece of mischief, which was, to scribble on small sheets of paper various affecting narratives —as that the *Gauntlet* was sinking, or desperately attacked by pirates, in such and such a latitude and longitude—insert them in empty bottles, and commit them to the chances of the deep; the object (as Mr. Fett explained it) being to throw Billy Priske's sweetheart off the scent. For two days past he had been slyly working upon Billy's fears, and was relating to him how, with two words, a Moorish lady had followed Gilbert à Becket from Palestine to London, and found him there—when my father, attracted by the smell of pitch, strolled forward and caught Mr. Badcock in the act of sealing the bottles

from a ladle which stood heating over a lamp. In the next five minutes the pair learnt that my father could lose his temper, and the lesson visibly scared them.

"Your pardon, sir," twittered Mr. Fett. "'Twas a foolish joke, I confess."

"I may lend some point to it," answered my father grimly, "by telling you what I had a mind to conceal, that you stand at this moment at no far remove from one of the worst dangers you have playfully invented. The wind has dropped again, as you perceive. Along the coast yonder live the worst pirates in the world, and with a glass we may all but discern the dreadful barracks in which so many hundreds of our fellow-Christians lie at this moment languishing. Please God we are only visible from the hill-country, and the coast tribes may miss to descry us! For our goal lies north and east, and to fail of it would break my heart. But 'twere a high enterprise for England some day to smoke out these robbers, and I know none to which a Christian man could more worthily engage himself."

Mr. Badcock shivered. "In our parish church," said he, "we used to take up a collection for these poor prisoners every Septuagesima. Many a sermon have I listened to and wondered at their sufferings, yet idly, as no doubt Axminster folk would wonder

at this plight of mine, could they hear of it at this moment."

My father, his wrath being yet recent, did not spare presently to paint our peril of capture and the possible consequences in lively colours; but, observing that Nat and I had drawn near to listen, he put on a cheerfuller tone.

"He will turn all this to the note of love, and within five minutes," I whispered to Nat, "or I'll forfeit five shillings."

My father could not have heard me; yet pat on the moment he rose to the bet as a fish to a fly.

"Yet love," said he, "love, the star of our quest, has shone before now into these dungeons, these dark ways of blood, these black and cruel hearts, and divinely illuminated them; as a score of histories bear witness, and among them one you shall hear.

The Story of the Rover and the Lord Provost's Daughter

"In Edinburgh, in the Canongate, there stands a tenement known as Morocco Land, over the second floor of which leans forward, like a figurehead, the wooden statue of a Moor, black and naked, with a turban and a string of beads; and concerning this statue the following tale is told.

"In the reign of King James or King Charles I. —I cannot remember which—there happened a riot in Edinburgh. Of its cause I am uncertain, but in the progress of it the mob, headed by a young man named Andrew Gray, set fire to the Lord Provost's house. The riot having been quelled, its ringleaders were seized and cast into the Tolbooth, and among them this Andrew Gray, who in due course was brought to judgment, and in spite of much private influence (for he came of good family) condemned to die. Before the day of execution, however, his friends managed to spirit him out of prison, whence he fled the country; and so escaped and in time was forgotten.

"Many years after, at a time when the plague was raging through Edinburgh, a Barbary corsair sailed boldly up the Firth of Forth and sent a message ashore to the Lord Provost, demanding twenty thousand pounds' ransom, and on a threat, if it were not paid within twenty-four hours, to burn all the shipping in the firth and along the quays. He required, meanwhile, a score of hostages for payment, and among them the Lord Provost's own son.

"The Lord Provost ran about like a man demented; since, to begin with, audacious as the terms were, the plague had spared him scarcely a hundred men capable of resistance. Moreover, he had no son,

but an only daughter, and she was lying upstairs sick almost to death with the distemper. So he made answer, promising the ransom, but explaining that he for his part could send no hostage. To this the Sallee captain replied politely—that he had some experience of the plague, and possessed an elixir which (he made sure) would cure the maiden if the Lord Provost would do him the honour to receive a visit; nay, that if he failed to cure her, he would remit the city's ransom.

"You may guess with what delight the father consented. The pirate came ashore in state, and was made welcome. The elixir was given; the damsel recovered; and in due course she married her Paynim foe, who now revealed himself as the escaped prisoner, Andrew Gray. He had risen high in the service of the Emperor of Morocco, and had fitted out his ship expressly to be revenged upon the city which had once condemned him to death. The story concludes that he settled down, and lived the rest of his life as one of its most reputable citizens."

"But what was the elixir?" inquired Mr. Badcock.

"T'cht!" answered my father testily.

"I agree with you, sir," said Mr. Fett. "Mr. Badcock's question was a foolish one. Speaking, however, as a mere man of business, and without

thought of rounding off the story artistically, I am curious to know how they settled the ransom."

Captain Pomery had taken in all canvas, to be as little conspicuous as possible; and all that day we lay becalmed under bare poles. Not content with this, he ordered out the boat, and the two seamen (Mike Halliday and Roger Wearne their names were) took turns with Nat and me in towing the *Gauntlet* off the coast. It was back-breaking work under a broiling sun, but before evening we had the satisfaction to lose all sight of land. Still we persevered and tugged until close upon midnight, when the captain called us aboard, and we tumbled asleep on deck, too weary even to seek our hammocks.

At daybreak next morning (Sunday) my father roused me. A light wind had sprung up from the shore, and with all canvas spread we were slipping through the water gaily; yet not so gaily (doubted Captain Pomery) as a lateen-sailed craft some four or five miles astern of us—a craft which he announced to be a Moorish xebec.

The *Gauntlet*—a flattish-bottomed ship—footed it well, before the wind, but not to compare with the xebec, which, indeed, was little more than a long open boat. After an hour's chase she had plainly reduced our lead by a mile or more. Then for close upon an hour we seemed to have the better of the

wind, and more than held our own; whereat the most of us openly rejoiced. For reasons which he kept to himself Captain Pomery did not share in our elation.

For sole armament (besides our muskets) the ketch carried, close after of her fore-hatchway, a little obsolete three-pounder gun, long since superannuated out of the Falmouth packet service. In the dim past, when he had bid for her at a public auction, Captain Pomery may have designed to use the gun as a chaser, or perhaps, even then, for decoration only. She served now—and had served for many a peaceful passage—but as a peg for spare coils of rope, and her rickety carriage as a supplement, now and then, for the bitts, which were somewhat out of repair. My father casting about, as the chase progressed, to put us on better terms of defence, suggested unlashing this gun and running her aft for a stern-chaser

Captain Pomery shook his head. "Where's the ammunition? We don't carry a single round shot aboard, nor haven't for years. Besides which she'd burst to a certainty."

"There's time enough to make up a few tins of canister," argued my father. "Or stay—" He smote his leg. "Didn't I tell you old Worthyvale would turn out the usefullest man on board?" he cried triumphantly.

"What's the matter with Worthyvale?"

"While we've been talking, Worthyvale has been doing. What has he been doing? Why, breaking up the ballast, and, if I'm not mistaken, into stones of the very size to load this gun."

"Give Badcock and me some share of credit," pleaded Mr. Fett. "Speaking less as an expert than from an imagination quickened by terror of all missiles, I suggest that a hundredweight or so of empty bottles, nicely broken up, would lend a d——d disagreeable diversity to the charge——"

"Not a bad idea at all," agreed my father.

"And a certain sting to our defiance; since I understand these ruffians drink nothing stronger than water," Mr. Fett concluded.

We spent the next half-hour in dragging the gun aft, and fetching up from the hold some twenty basket-loads of stone. It required a personal appeal from my father before old Worthyvale would part with so much of his treasure.

During twenty minutes of this time, the xebec, having picked up with the stronger breeze, had been shortening her distance (as Captain Pomery put it) hand-over-fist. But no sooner had we loaded the little gun and trained her ready for use, than my father, pausing to mop his brow, cried out that the Moor was losing her breeze again. She perceptibly

slackened way, and before long the water astern of her ceased to be ruffled. An oily calm spreading across the sea from shoreward overhauled her by degrees, overtook, and held her, with sails idle and sheets tautening and sagging as she rolled on the heave of the swell.

Captain Pomery promptly checked our rejoicing, telling us this was about the worst that could happen. "We shall carry this wind for another ten minutes at the most," he assured us. "And these devils have boats."

So it proved. Within ten minutes our booms were swinging uselessly; the sea spread calm for miles around us; and we saw no fewer than three boats being lowered from the xebec, now about four miles away.

"There is nothing but to wait for 'em," said my father, seating himself on deck with his musket across his knees. "Mr. Badcock!"

"Sir?"

"To-day is Sunday."

"It is, sir. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thou hast to do, but on the Seventh day (if you'll excuse me) there's a different kind of feeling in the air. At home, sir, I have observed that even the rooks count on it."

"You have a fine voice, Mr. Badcock, and

have been, as I gather, an attentive hearer of sermons."

"I may claim that merit, sir."

"If you can remember one sufficiently well to rehearse it to us, I feel that it would do us all good."

Mr. Badcock coughed. "Oh, sir," he protested, "I couldn't! I reelly couldn't. You'll excuse me, but I hold very strong opinions on unlicensed preaching." He hesitated; then suddenly his brow cleared. "But I can read you one, sir. *Reading* one is altogether another matter."

"You have a book of sermons on board?"

"Before starting, sir, happening to cast my eye over the bookcase in the bedroom . . . a volume of Dr. South's, sir, if you'll excuse my liberty in borrowing it."

He ran and fetched the volume, while we disposed ourselves to listen.

"Where shall I begin, sir?"

"Wherever you please. The book belongs to my brother Gervase; for myself I have not even a bowing acquaintance with the good Doctor."

"The first sermon, sir, is upon Human Perfection."

"It should have been the last, surely?"

"Not so, sir; for it starts with Adam in the Garden of Eden."

"Let us hear, then."

Mr. Badcock cleared his throat and read:

The image of God in man is that universal rectitude of all the faculties of the soul, by which they stand apt and disposed to their respective offices and operations.

"Hold a moment," interrupted my father, whose habit of commenting aloud in church had often disconcerted Mr. Grylls. "Are you quite sure, Mr. Badcock, that we are not starting with the Doctor's peroration?"

"This is the first page, sir."

"Then the Doctor himself began at the wrong end. Prosper, will you take a look astern and report me how many boats are coming?"

"Three, sir," said I. "The third has just pushed off from the ship."

"Thank you. Proceed, Mr. Badcock."

And first for its noblest faculty, the understanding. It was then sublime, clear, and aspiring, and as it were the soul's upper region, lofty and serene, free from the vapours and disturbances of the inferior affections. . . . Like the sun it had both light and agility; it knew no rest but in motion; no quiet but in activity. . . . It did arbitrate upon the several reports of sense, and all the varieties of imagination; not like a drowsy judge, only hearing, but also directing their verdict. In sum, it was vegete, quick, and lively; open as the day, untainted as the morning, full of the innocence and sprightliness of youth; it gave the soul a bright and a full view into all things.

"A fine piece of prose," remarked Mr. Fett as Mr. Badcock drew breath.

"A fine fiddlestick, sir!" quoth my father. "The man is talking largely on matters of which he can know nothing; and in five minutes (I bet you) he will come a cropper."

Mr. Badcock resumed:

For the understanding speculative there are some general maxims and notions in the mind of man, which are the rules of discourse and the basis of all philosophy.

"As, for instance, never to beg the question," snapped my father, who from this point let scarce a sentence pass without pishing and pshawing.

Now it was Adam's happiness in the state of innocence to have these clear and unsullied. He came into the world a philosopher——

("Instead of which he went and ate an apple.")

He could see consequents yet dormant in their principles, and effects yet unborn and in the womb of their causes.

("'Tis a pity, then, he took not the trouble to warn Eve.")

His understanding could almost pierce to future contingencies. . . .

("Ay, 'almost.' The fellow begins to scent mis-

chief, and thinks to set himself right with a saving clause. Why 'almost'?")

his conjectures improving even to prophecy, or to certainties of prediction. Till his fall he was ignorant of nothing but sin; or, at least, it rested in the notion without the smart of the experiment.

My father stamped the butt of his musket upon deck. "'Rested in the notion,' did it? Nothing of the sort, sir! It rested in the apple, which he was told not to eat; but, nevertheless, ate. Born a philosopher, was he? And knew the effect of every cause without knowing the difference between good and evil? Why, man, 'twas precisely against becoming a philosopher that the Almighty took pains to warn him!"

Mr. Badcock hastily turned a page.

The image of God was no less resplendent in that which we call man's practical understanding—namely, that storehouse of the soul in which are treasured up the rules of action and the seeds of morality. Now of this sort are these maxims: "That God is to be worshipped," "That parents are to be honoured," "That a man's word is to be kept." It was the privilege of Adam innocent to have these notions also firm and untainted——

My father flung up both hands. "Oh! So Adam honoured his father and his mother?"

"Belike," suggested Billy Priske, scratching his

head, "Eve was expectin', and he invented it to keep her spirits up."

"I assure you, sir," Mr. Badcock protested with dignity, "Dr. South was the most admired preacher of his day. Her late Majesty offered him the Deanery of Westminster."

"I could have found a better preferment for him, then; that of Select Preacher to the Marines."

"If you will have patience, sir——"

"Prosper, how near is the leading boat?"

"A good mile away, sir, as yet."

"Then I will have patience, Mr. Badcock."

"The Doctor, sir, proceeds to make some observations on Love, with which you will find yourself able to agree. 'Love,' he says,

'is the great instrument and engine of Nature, the bond and cement of society; the spring and spirit of the universe. . . . Now this affection in the state of innocence was happily pitched upon its right object——'"

"'Happily,' did you say? 'Happily?' Why, good Heavens, sir! how many women had Adam to go gallivanting after? Enough, enough, gentlemen! To your guns! and in the strength of a faith which must be strong indeed, to have survived its expositors!"

By this time, through our glasses, we could dis-

cern the faces of the pirates, who, crowded in the bows and stern-sheets of the two leading boats, weighted them almost to the water's edge. The third had dropped, maybe, half a mile behind in the race, but these two came on, stroke for stroke, almost level —each measuring, at a guess, some sixteen feet, and manned by eight rowers. They bore down straight for our stern, until within a hundred yards; then separated, with the evident intention of boarding us upon either quarter. At fifty yards the musketeers in their bows opened fire, while my father whistled to old Worthyvale, who, during Dr. South's sermon, had been bringing the points of half-a-dozen hand-spikes to a red heat in the galley fire. The two seamen, Nat and I, retorted with a volley, and Nat had the satisfaction to drop the steersman of the boat making towards our starboard quarter. Unluckily, as it seemed—for this was the boat on which my father was training our three-pounder—this threw her into momentary confusion at a range at which he would not risk firing, and allowed her mate to run in first and close with us. The confusion, however, lasted but ten seconds at the most; a second steersman stepped to the helm; and the boat came up with a rush and grated alongside, less than half a minute behind her consort.

Now the *Gauntlet,* as the reader will remember,

sailed in ballast, and therefore carried herself pretty high in the water. Moreover, our enemies ran in and grappled us just forward of her quarter, where she carried a movable panel in her bulwarks, to give access to an accommodation ladder. While Nat, Captain Pomery, Mr. Fett, and the two seamen ran to defend the other side, at a nod from my father I thrust this panel open, leapt back, and Mr. Badcock aiding, ran the little gun out, while my father depressed its muzzle over the boat. In our excess of zeal we had nearly run her overboard; indeed, I believe that overboard she would have gone had not my father applied the red-hot iron in the nick of time. The explosion that followed not only flung us staggering to right and left, but lifted her on its recoil clean out of her rickety carriage, and kicked her half-way across the deck.

Recovering myself, I gripped my musket and ran to the bulwark. A heave of the swell had lifted the boat up to receive our discharge, which must have burst point-blank upon her bottom boards; for I leaned over in bare time to see her settling down in a swirl beneath the feet of her crew, who, after vainly grabbing for hold at the *Gauntlet's* sides, flung themselves forward and were swimming one and all in a sea already discoloured for some yards with blood.

My father called to me to fire. I heard; but for

the moment the dusky upturned faces with their bared teeth fascinated me. They looked up at me like faces of wild beasts, neither pleading nor hating, and in response I merely stared.

A cry from the larboard bulwarks aroused me. Three Moors, all naked to the waist, had actually gained the deck. A fourth, with a long knife clenched between his teeth, stood steadying himself by the main rigging in the act to leap; and in the act of turning I saw Captain Pomery chop at his ankles with a cutlass and bring him down. We made a rush on the others. One my father clubbed senseless with the butt of his musket; one the two seamen turned and chased forward to the bows, where he leapt overboard; the third, after hesitating an instant, retreated, swung himself over the bulwark, and dropped back into the boat.

But a second cry from Mr. Fett warned us that more were coming. Mr. Fett had caught up a sack of stones, and was staggering with it to discharge it on our assailants when this fresh uprush brought him to a check.

"That fellow has more head than I gave him credit for," panted my father. "The gun, lad! Quick, the gun!"

We ran to where the gun lay, and lifted it between us, straining under its weight; lurched with it to the

side, heaved it up, and sent it over into the second boat with a crash. Prompt on the crash came a yell, and we stared in each other's faces, giddy with our triumph, as John Worthyvale came tottering out of the cook's galley with two fresh red-hot handspikes.

The third boat had come to a halt, less than seventy yards away. A score of bobbing heads were swimming for her, the nearer ones offering a fair mark for musketry. We held our fire, however, and watched them. The boat took in a dozen or so, and then, being dangerously overcrowded, left the rest to their fate, and headed back for the xebec. The swimmers clearly hoped nothing from us. They followed the boat, some of them for a long while. Through our glasses we saw them sink one by one.

CHAPTER XII

HOW WE LANDED ON THE ISLAND

"Friend Sancho," said the Duke, "the isle I have promised you can neither stir nor fly. And whether you return to it upon the flying horse, or trudge back to it in misfortune, a pilgrim from house to house and from inn to inn, you will always find your isle just where you left it, and your islanders with the same goodwill to welcome you as they ever had."—*Don Quixote.*

Night fell, and the xebec had made no further motion to attack: but yet, as the calm held, Captain Pomery continued gloomy: nor did his gloom lift at all when the enemy, as soon as it was thoroughly dark, began to burn flares and torches.

"That will be a signal to the shore," said he. "Though, please God, they are too far for it to reach."

The illumination served us in one way. While it lasted no boat could push out from the xebec without our perceiving it. The fires lasted until after eight bells, when the captain, believing that he scented a breeze ahead, turned us out into the boat again, to tow the ketch towards it. For my part, I tugged and sweated but scented no breeze. On the contrary, the

night seemed intolerably close and sultry, as though brooding a thunderstorm. When the xebec's fires died down, darkness settled on us like a cap. The only light came from the water where our oars swirled it in pools of briming[1] or the tow-rope dropped for a moment and left for another moment a trail of fire.

Neither Mr. Fett nor Mr. Badcock could pull an oar, and old Worthyvale had not the strength for it. The rest of us—all but the captain, who steered and kept what watch he could astern—took the rowing by hourly relays, pair and pair: Billy Priske and I, my father and Mike Halliday, Nat and Roger Wearne.

It had come round again to Billy's turn and mine, and the hour was that darkest one which promises the near daylight. Captain Pomery, foreboding that dawn would bring with it an instant need of a clear head, and being by this time overweighted with drowsiness, had stepped below for forty winks, leaving Wearne in charge of the helm. My father and Nat had tumbled into their berths. We had left Mr. Badcock stationed and keeping watch on the larboard side, near the waist; and now and then, as we tugged, I fancied I could see the dim figures of Mr. Fett and Mike Halliday standing above us in converse near the bows.

[1] Phosphorescence.

Of imminent danger—danger close at hand—I had no fear at all, trusting that the still night would carry any sound of mischief, and moreover that no boat could approach without being signalled, a hundred yards off, by the briming in the water. So intolerably hot and breathless had the night become that I spoke to Billy to easy a stroke while I pulled off my shirt. I had drawn it over my head and was slipping my arms clear of the sleeves, when I felt, or thought I felt, a light waft of wind on my right cheek—the first breath of the gathering thunderstorm—and turned up my face towards it. At that instant I heard a short warning cry from somewhere by the helm; not a call of alarm, but just such a gasp as a man will utter when slapped on the shoulder at unawares from behind; then a patter of naked feet rushing aft; then a score of outcries blending into one wild yell as a whole boatload of Moors leapt and swarmed over the starboard bulwark.

The tow-rope, tautening under the last stroke of our oars, had drawn the boat back in its recoil, and she now drifted close under the *Gauntlet's* jibboom, which ran out upon a very short bowsprit. I stood up, and, reaching for a grip on the dolphin-striker, swung myself on to the bobstay and thence to the cap of the bowsprit, where I sat astride for a moment while Billy followed. We were barefoot both and

naked to the waist. Cautiously as a pair of cats we worked along the bowsprit to the foremast-stay, at the foot of which the foresail lay loose and ready for hoisting. With a fold of this I covered myself and peered along the pitch-dark deck.

No shot had been fired. I could distinguish no sound of struggle, no English voice in all the din. The ship seemed to be full only of yellings, rushings to-and-fro of feet, wild hammerings upon timber, solid and hollow: and these pell-mell noises made the darkness, if not darker, at least more terribly confusing.

The cries abated a little; the noise of hammering increased, and at the same time grew persistent and regular, almost methodical. I had no sooner guessed the meaning of this—that the ruffians were fastening down the hatches on their prisoners—than one of them, at the far end of the ship, either fetched or found a lantern, lit it, and stood it on the after-hatch. Its rays glinted on the white teeth and eyeballs, and dusky, shining skins of a whole ring of Moors gathered around the hatchway and nailing all secure.

Now for the first time it came into my mind that these rovers spared to kill while there remained a chance of taking their prisoners alive; that their prey was ever the crew before the cargo; and that, as

for the captured vessel, they usually scuttled and sank her if she drew too much water for their shallow harbours, or if (like the *Gauntlet*) she lacked the speed for their trade. The chances were, then, that my father yet lived. Yet how could I, naked and unarmed, reach to him or help him?

A sound, almost plumb beneath me, recalled me to more selfish alarms. The Moors, whether they came from the xebec or, as we agreed later, more probably from shore, in answer to the xebec's signal-lights—must have dropped down on us without stroke of oars. It may be that for the last half a mile or more they had wriggled their boat down to the attack by means of an oar or sweep shipped in the stern-notch: a device which would avoid all noise and, if they came slowly, all warning but the ripple of briming off the bows. In any case they had not failed to observe that the ketch was being towed; and now, having discharged her boarding-party, their boat pushed forward to capture ours, which lay beneath us bumping idly against the *Gauntlet's* stem. I heard some half a dozen of them start to jabber as they found it empty. I divined—I could not see—the astonishment in their faces as they stared up into the darkness.

Just then—perhaps in response to their cries—a comrade on deck ran forward to the bows and leaned

over to hail them, standing so close to me that his shoulder brushed against the fold of the foresail within which I cowered. Like me, he was bare to the waist, but around his loins he wore a belt scaled with silver sequins that glimmered in the far rays of the lantern, or perhaps in the first weak light of the approaching dawn . . .

I know not what madness took me at the sight: but in a sudden rage I gripped the forestay with my left hand, lowered my right, and, slipping my fingers under his belt, lifted him—he was a light man—swung him outboard and overboard, and dropped him into the sea.

I heard the splash with which he struck the water: an ugly thud too, which told me that some part of him had struck the boat's gunwale. I waited—it seemed that I waited many seconds—expecting the answering yell . . . or a shot perhaps. Still gripping the forestay with my left hand, I bent forward, ready to leap for deck. But even as I bent thus, the bowsprit shook under me like a whip and the deck before me opened in a yellow sheet of fire. The whole ship seemed to burst asunder and shut again as the flame of the explosion went wavering up the rigging, and I found myself hanging on to the forestay for dear life and dangling over emptiness. While I dangled I heard in the roaring echoes an

other splash, and knew that Billy Priske had been thrown from his hold; a splash, and close upon it a heavy, grinding sound, a crash of burst planks, an outcry ending in a wail as the lifting sea bore back the Moors' boat and our own together upon the *Gauntlet's* stem and smashed them like eggshells.

Then, as the ketch heaved and heaved again in the light of the flames that ran up the tarry rigging, at one rush the dawn broke; with no flush of sunshine, but with a grey, steel-coloured ray that cut the darkness around us like a sword. I had managed to hoist myself again astride the bowsprit, and, clinging so, had time in one glance aft to take in the scene of ruin. Yet in that glance I saw it—the yawning hole, the unheaved, jagged deck-planks, the dark bodies hurled to right and left into the scuppers—by three separate lights: by the yellow light of the flames in the rigging, by the steel-grey light of dawn, and by a sudden white hot-flash as the lightning ripped open the belly of heaven and let loose the rain. While I blinked in the glare, the mizzen-mast crashed overside. I cannot tell whether the lightning struck and split it or whether, already blasted by the explosion, it had stood upright for those few seconds until a heave of the swell snapped the charred stays and released it. Nay, even the dead beat of the rain may have helped.

In all my life I have never known such rain. Its noise drowned the thunderclap. It fell in no drops or threads of drops, but in one solid flood as from a burst bag. It extinguished the blaze in the rigging as easily as you would blow out a candle. It beat me down prone upon the bowsprit, and with such force that I felt my ribs giving upon the timber. It stunned me as a bather is stunned who, swimming in a pool beneath a waterfall, ventures his head into the actual cascade. It flooded the deck so that two minutes later when I managed to lift my head I saw the bodies of two Moors washed down the starboard scuppers and clean through a gap in the broken bulwark, their brown legs lifting as they toppled and shot over the edge.

No wind had preceded the storm. The lightning had leapt out of a still sky—still, that is, until jarred and set vibrating by the explosion. But now, as the downpour eased, the wind came on us with a howl, catching the ship so fierce a cuff, as she rolled with mainsail set and no way on her, that she careened until the sea ran in through her lee scuppers, and, for all the loss of her mizzen-mast, came close to being thrown on her beam ends.

While she righted herself—which she began to do but slowly—I leapt for the deck and ran aft, avoiding the jagged splinters, in time to catch sight of

my father's head and shoulders emerging through the burst hatchway.

"Hullo!" he sang out cheerfully, lifting his voice against the wind. "God be praised, lad! I was fearing we had lost you."

"But what has happened?" I shouted.

Before he could answer a voice hailed us over stern, and we hurried aft to find Billy Priske dragging himself towards the ship by the raffle of mizzen-rigging. We hoisted him in over the quarter and he dropped upon deck in a sitting posture.

"Is my head on?" he asked, taking it in both hands.

"You are hurt, Billy?"

"Not's I know by," answered Billy, and stared about him. "What's become o' the brown vermin?"

"They seem to have disappeared," said my father, likewise looking about him.

"But what on earth has happened?" I persisted, catching him by the shoulder and shouting in his ear above the roar of a second sudden squall.

"I—blew up—the ship. Captain wouldn't listen —academical fellows, these skippers—like every one else brought up in a profession. So I mutinied and blew—her—up. He's wounded, by the way."

"Tell you what," yelled Billy, staggering up, "we'll be at the bottom in two shakes if somebody

don't handle her in these puffs. Why, where's the wheel?"

"Gone," answered my father. "Blown away, it appears."

"*And* she don't right herself!"

"Ballast has shifted. The gunpowder blew it every way. Well, well—poor old John Worthyvale won't mourn it. I left him below, past praying for."

"Look here, Master Prosper," shouted Billy. "If the ship won't steer we must get that mains'l in or we're lost men. Run you and cast off the peak halliards while I lower. The Lord be praised, here's Mike, too," he cried as Mike Halliday appeared at the hatchway, nursing a badly burnt arm. "Glad to see ye, Mike, and wish I could say the same to poor Roger. The devils knifed poor Roger, I reckon."

"No, they did not," said my father in a lull of the wind. "They knocked him on the back of the head and slid his body down the after-companion. The noise of him bumping down the ladder was what first fetched me awake. He's a trifle dazed yet, but recovering."

"'Tis a short life he'll recover to, unless we stir ourselves." Billy clutched my father's arm. "Look 'ee, master! See what they heathens be doin'!"

"We have scared 'em," said my father. "They are putting about."

"*Something* has scared 'em, sure 'nough. But if 'tis from us they be in any such hurry to get away, why did they take in a reef before putting the helm over? No, no, master: they know the weather hereabouts, and we don't. We've been reckonin' this for a thunderstorm—a short blow and soon over. They know better, seemin' to me. Else why don't they tack alongside and finish us?"

"I believe you are right," said my father, after a long look to windward.

"And I'm sure of it," insisted Billy. "What's more, if we can't right the ballast a bit and get steerage way on her afore the sea works up, she'll go down under us inside the next two hours. There's the pumps, too: for if she don't take in water like a basket I was never born in Wendron parish an' taught blastin'. Why, master, you must ha' blown the very oakum out of her seams!"

My father frowned thoughtfully. "That's true," said he: "I have been congratulating myself too soon. Billy, in the absence of Captain Pomery I appoint you skipper. You have an ugly job to face, but do your best."

"Skipper, be I? Then right you are!" answered Billy with a cheerful smile. "An' the first order is

for you and Master Prosper here to tumble below an' heft ballast for your lives. Be the two specimens safe?"

"Eh?" It took my father a second, maybe, to fit this description to Messrs. Badcock and Fett. "Ah, to be sure! Yes, I left them safe and unhurt."

"What's no good never comes to harm," said Billy. "Send 'em on deck, then, and I'll put 'em on to the pumps."

We left Billy face to face with a job which indeed looked to be past hope. The wheel had gone, and with it the binnacle; and where these had stood, from the stump of the broken mizzen-mast right aft to the taffrail, there yawned a mighty hole fringed with splintered deck-planking. The explosion had gutted after-hold, after-cabin, sail-locker, and laid all bare even to the stern-post. 'Twas a marvel the stern itself had not been blown out: but as a set-off against this mercy—and the most grievous of all, though as yet we had not discovered it—we had lost our rudder-head, and the rudder itself hung by a single pintle.

"Nevertheless," maintained my father as we toiled together upon the ballast, "I took the only course, and in like circumstances I would venture it again. The captain very properly thought first of

his ship: but I preferred to think that we were in a hurry."

"How did you contrive it?" I asked, pausing to ease my back and listening for a moment to the sound of hatchets on deck. (They were cutting away the tangle of the mizzen-rigging.)

"Very simply," said he. "There must have been a dozen hammering on the after-hatch, and I guessed they would have another dozen looking on and offering advice: so I sent Halliday to fetch a keg of powder, and poured about half of it on the top stair of the companion. The rest Halliday took and heaped on a sea-chest raised on a couple of tables close under the deck. We ran up our trains on a couple of planks laid aslant, and touched off at a signal. There were two explosions, but we timed them so prettily that I believe they went off in one."

"They did," said I.

"My wits must have been pretty clear, then—at the moment. Afterwards (I don't mind confessing to you) I lay for some minutes where the explosion flung me. In my hurry I had overdone the dose somewhat."

We had been shovelling for an hour and more. Already the ship began to labour heavily, and my father climbed to the deck to observe the alteration in her trim. He dropped back and picked up his

shovel again in a chastened silence. In fact Deputy-captain Priske (who had just accomplished the ticklish task of securing the rudder and lashing a couple of ropes to its broken head for steering-gear) had ordered him back to work, using language not unmixed with objurgation.

For all our efforts the *Gauntlet* still canted heavily to leeward, and as the gale grew to its height the little canvas necessary to heave-to came near to drowning us. Towards midnight our plight grew so desperate that Billy, consulting no one, determined to risk all—the unknown dangers of the coast, his complete ignorance of navigation, the risk of presenting her crazy stern-timbers to the following seas—and run for it. At once we were called up from the hold and set to relieve the half-dead workers at the pumps.

All that night we ran blindly, and all next day. The gale had southerned and we no longer feared a lee-shore: but for forty-eight hours we lived with the present knowledge that the next stern-wave might engulf us as its predecessor had just missed to do. The waves, too, in this inland sea, were not the great rollers—the great kindly giants—of our Atlantic gales, but shorter and more vicious in impact: and, under Heaven, our only hope against them hung by the two ropes of Billy's jury steering-gear.

They served us nobly. Towards sunset of the second day, although to eye and ear the gale had not sensibly abated, and the sea ran by us as tall as ever, we knew that the worst was over. We could not have explained our assurance. It was a feeling —no more—but one which any man will recognise who has outlived a like time of peril on the sea. We did not hope again, for we were past the effort to hope. Numb, drenched, our very skins bleached like a washerwoman's hands, our eyes caked with brine, our limbs so broken with weariness of the eternal pumping that when our shift was done, where we fell there we lay, and had to be kicked aside—we had scarcely the spirit to choose between life and death. Yet all the while we had been fighting for life like madmen.

Towards the close of the day, too, Roger Wearne had made shift to crawl on deck and bear a hand. Captain Pomery lay in the huddle of the forecastle, no man tending him: and old Worthyvale awaited burial, stretched in the hold upon the ballast.

At whiles, as my fingers cramped themselves around the handle of the pump, it seemed as though we had been fighting this fight, tholing this misery, gripping the verge of this precipice for years upon years, and this nightmare sat heaviest upon me when the third morning broke and I turned in the sudden

blessed sunshine—but we blessed it not—and saw what age the struggle had written on my father's face. I passed a hand over my dazed eyes, and at that moment Mr. Fett, who had been snatching an hour's sleep below—and no man better deserved it—thrust his head up through the broken hatchway, carolling—

> To all you ladies now at land
> We men at sea indite,
> But first would have you understand
> How hard it is to write:
> Our paper, pen and ink, and we
> Roll up and down our ships at sea,
> With a fa-*la*-LA!

"Catch him!" cried my father sharply; but he meant not Mr. Fett. His eyes were on Billy Priske, who, perched on the temporary platform, where almost without relief he had sat and steered us, shouting his orders without sign of fatigue, sank forward with the rudder-ropes dragging through his hands, and dropped into the hold.

For me I cast myself down on deck with face upturned to the sun, and slept.

. . . . . .

I woke to find my father seated close to me, cross-legged, examining a sextant.

"The plague of it is," he grumbled, "that

even supposing myself to have mastered this diabolical instrument, we have ne'er a compass on board."

Glancing aft, I saw that Mike Halliday had taken Billy's place at the helm. At my elbow lay Nat, still sleeping. Mr. Badcock had crawled to the bulwarks and leaned there in uncontrollable sea-sickness. Until the gale was done I believe he had not felt a qualm. Now, on the top of his nausea he had to endure the raillery of Mr. Fett, whose active fancy had already invented a grotesque and wholly untruthful accusation against his friend—namely, that when assailed by the Moors, and in the act of being kicked below, he had dropped on his knees and offered to turn Mohammedan.

That evening we committed old Worthyvale's body to the sea: and my father, having taken his first observation at noon, carefully entered the latitude and longitude in his pocket-book. On consulting the chart we found the alleged bearings somewhere south of Asia-Minor—to be exact, off the coast of Pamphylia. My father therefore added the word "approximately" to his entry and waited for Captain Pomery to recover.

Though the sea went down even more quickly than it had arisen, the pumps kept us fairly busy. All that night, under a clear and starry sky, we steered

for the north-east with the wind brisk upon our starboard quarter.

I have no chart,
No compass but a heart,

quoted I in mischief to Nat. But Nat, having passed through a real gale, had saved not sufficient fondness for his verse to blush for it. We should have been mournful for old Worthyvale, but that night we knew only that it was good, being young, to have escaped death. Under the stars we made bad jokes on Mr. Badcock's sea-sickness and sang in chorus to Mr. Fett's solos:

With a fa-la, fa-la, fa-la-la!
To all you ladies now at land . . .

Next morning Captain Pomery (whose hurt was a pretty severe concussion of the skull, the explosion having flung him into the panelling of the ship's cabin, and against a knee of a beam) returned to duty and professed himself able, with help, to take a reckoning. He relieved us of another anxiety by producing a pocket-compass from his fob.

My father held the sextant for him: while Nat, under instructions, worked out the sum. With a compass, upon a chart spread on the deck, I pricked out the bearings—with a result that astonished all as I leapt up and stared across the bows.

"Why, lad, by the look of you we should be running ashore!" exclaimed my father.

"And so we should be at this moment," said I, "were not the reckoning out."

Captain Pomery reached out for the paper. "The reckoning is right enough," said he after studying it awhile.

"Then on what land, in Heaven's name, are we running?" my father demanded testily.

"Why, on Corsica," I answered, pointing with my compass' foot as he bent over the chart. "On Corsica. Where else?"

It wanted between three and four hours of sunset when we made the landfall and assured ourselves that what appeared so like a low cloud on the east-north-eastern horizon was indeed the wished-for island. We fell to discussing our best way to approach it; my father at first maintaining that the coast would be watched by Genoese vessels, and therefore we should do wisely to take down sail and wait for darkness.

Against this Captain Pomery maintained—

1. That we were carrying a fair wind, and the Lord knew how long that would hold.

2. That the moon would rise in less than three hours after dark, and thenceforth we should

run almost the same risk of detection as by daylight.

3. That in any case we could pass for what we really were, an English trader in ballast, barely escaped from shipwreck, dismasted, with broken steerage, making for the nearest port. "Man," said Captain Pomery looking about him, "we must be a poor set of liars if we can't pitch a yarn on *this* evidence!"

My father allowed himself to be persuaded, the more easily as the argument jumped with his impatience. Accordingly, we stood on for land, making no concealment; and the wind holding steady on our beam, and the sun dropping astern of us in a sky without a cloud, 'twas incredible how soon we began to make out the features of the land. It rose like a shield to a central boss, which trembled, as it were, into view and revealed itself a mountain peak, snow-capped and shining, before ever the purple mist began to slip from the slopes below it and disclose their true verdure. No sail broke the expanse of sea between us and the shore; and, as we neared it, no scarp of cliff, no house or group of houses broke the island's green monotony. From the water's edge to the high snow-line it might have been built of moss, so vivid its colour was, yet soft as velvet, and softer and still more vivid as we approached.

Within two miles of shore, and not long before dark, the wind (as Captain Pomery had promised) broke off and headed us, blowing cool and fresh off the land. I was hauling in the foresheet and belaying when a sudden waft of fragrance fetched me upright, with head thrown back and nostrils inhaling the breeze.

"Ay," said my father at my elbow, "there is no scent on earth to compare with it. You smell the *macchia*, lad. Drink well your first draught of it, delicious as first love."

"But somewhere—at some time—I have smelt it before," said I. "The same scent, only fainter. Why does it remind me of home?"

My father considered. "I will tell you," he said. "In the corridor at home, outside my bedroom door, stands a wardrobe, and in it hang the clothes I wore, near upon twenty years ago, in Corsica. They keep the fragrance of the *macchia* yet; and if, as a child, you ever opened that wardrobe you recall it at this moment."

"Yes," said I, "that was the scent."

My father leaned and gazed at the island with dim eyes.

Still no sign of house or habitation greeted us as we worked by short tacks towards a deep bay which my father, after a prolonged consultation of the

chart, decided to be that of Sagona. A sharp promontory ran out upon its northern side, and within the shelter of this Captain Pomery looked to find good anchorage. But the *Gauntlet,* after all her battering, lay so poorly to the wind that darkness overtook us a good mile from land, and before we weathered the point and cast anchor in a little bight within, the moon had risen. It showed us a steep shore near at hand with many grey pinnacles of granite glimmering high over dark masses of forest trees, and in the farthest angle of the bight its rays travelled in silver down the waters of a miniature creek.

The hawser ran out into five fathoms of water. We had lost our boat: but Billy Priske had spent his afternoon in fashioning a raft out of four empty casks and half a dozen broken lengths of deck-planking; and on this, leaving the seamen on board, the rest of us pushed off for shore. For paddles we used a couple of spare oars.

The water, smooth as in a lake, gave us our choice to make a landing where we would. My father, however, who had taken command, chose to steer straight for the entrance of the little creek. There, between tall entrance rocks of granite, we passed straight into the shadow of folding woods where the moon was lost to us. Sounding with our paddles, we found a good depth of water under the raft, lit a

lantern, and pushed on, my father promising that we should discover a village or at least a hamlet at the creek-head.

"And you will find the inhabitants—your subjects, Prosper—hospitable too. Whatever the island may have been in Seneca's time, to deserve the abuse he heaped on it in exile, to-day the Corsicans keep more of the old classical virtues than any nation known to me. In vendetta they will slay one another, using the worst treachery; but a stranger may walk the length of the island unarmed—save against the Genoese—and find a meal at the poorest cottage, and a bed, however rough, whereon he may lay his head and sleep untroubled by suspicion."

The raft grated and took ground on a shelving bank of sand: when Nat, who stood forward holding the lantern, made a motion to step on shore. My father restrained him.

"Prosper goes first."

I stepped on to the bank. My father, following, stooped, gathered a handful of the fine granite sand, and, holding it in the lantern's light, let it run through his fingers.

"Hat off, lad! and salute your kingdom!"

"But where," said I, "be my subjects?"

It seemed, as we formed ourselves into marching order, that I was on the point to be answered. For

above the bank we came to a causeway which our lanterns plainly showed us to be man's handiwork; and, following it round the bend of a valley where a stream sang its way down to the creek, came suddenly on a flat meadow swept by the pale light and rising to a grassy slope where a score of whitewashed houses huddled around a tall belfry, all glimmering under the moon.

"In Corsica," repeated my father, leading the way across the meadow, "every householder is a host."

He halted at the base of the village street.

"It is curious, however, that the dogs have not heard us. Their barking, as a rule, is something to remember."

He stepped up to the first house to knock. There was no door to knock upon. The building stood open, desolate. Our lanterns showed the grass growing on its threshold.

We tried the next and the next. The whole village lay dead, abandoned. We gathered in the street and shouted, raising our lanterns aloft. No voice answered us.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW WITHOUT FIGHTING OUR ARMY WASTED BY ENCHANTMENT

Adrian. The air breathes upon us here most sweetly . . .
Gonzalo. Here is everything advantageous to life.
Antonio. True: save means to live.

Caliban. Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
—*The Tempest.*

Upon a sudden thought my father hurried us towards the tall belfry. It rose cold and white against the moon, at the end of a nettle-grown lane. A garth of ilex-oaks surrounded it; and beside it, more than half-hidden by the untrimmed trees, stood a ridiculously squat church. By instinct, or, rather, from association of ideas learnt in England, I glanced around this churchyard for its gravestones. There were none. Yet for the second time within these few hours I was strangely reminded of home, where in an upper garret were stacked half a dozen age-begrimed paintings on panel, one of which on an idle day two years ago I had taken a fancy to scour with soap and water. The painting repre-

sented a tall man, crowned and wearing Eastern armour, with a small slave in short jacket and baggy white breeches holding a white charger in readiness; all three figures awkwardly drawn and without knowledge of anatomy. For background my scouring had brought to light a group of buildings, and among them just such a church as this, with just such a belfry. Of architecture and its different styles I knew nothing; but, comparing the church before me with what I could recollect of the painting, I recognised every detail, from the cupola, high-set upon open arches, to the round, windowless apse in which the building ended.

My father, meanwhile, had taken a lantern and explored the interior.

"I know this place," he announced quietly as he reappeared, after two or three minutes, in the ruinous doorway: "it is called Paomia. We can bivouac in peace, and I doubt that by searching we could find a better spot."

We ate our supper of cold bacon and ship-bread, both slightly damaged by sea-water—but the wine solaced us, being excellent—and stretched ourselves to sleep under the ilex boughs, my father undertaking to stand sentry till daybreak. Nat and I protested against this, and offered ourselves; but he cut us short. He had his reasons, he said.

It must have been two or even three hours later that I awoke at the touch of his hand on my shoulder. I stared up through the boughs at the setting moon, and around me at my comrades asleep in the grasses. He signed to me not to awake them, but to stand up and follow him softly.

Passing through the screen of ilex, we came to a gap in the stone wall of the garth, and through this, at the base of the hillside below the forest, to a second screen of cypress which opened suddenly upon a semicircle of turf; and here, bathed in the moon's rays that slanted over the cypress-tops, stood a small Doric temple of weather-stained marble, in proportions most delicate, a background for a dance of nymphs, a fit tiring-room for Diana and her train.

Its door—if ever it had possessed one—was gone, like every other door in this strange village. My father led the way up the white steps, halted on the threshold, and, standing aside lest he should block the moonlight, pointed within.

I stood at his shoulder and looked. The interior was empty, bare of all ornament. On the wall facing the door, and cut in plain letters a foot high, two words confronted me:

ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΡΙ ΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΠΟΥΛΩΙ

"A tomb?" I asked.

"Yes, and a kinsman's; for the Stephanopouli

were of blood the emperors did not disdain to mate with. In the last rally the Turks had much ado with them as leaders of the Moreote tribes around Maina, and north along Taygetus to Sparta. Yes, and there were some who revived the Spartan name in those days, maintaining the fight among the mountains until the Turks swarmed across from Crete, overran Maina, and closed the struggle. Yet there was a man, Constantine Stephanopoulos, the grandfather of this Philopater, who would buy nothing at the price of slavery, but, collecting a thousand souls—men, women, and children—escaped by ship from Porto Vitilo and sailed in search of a new home. At first he had thought of Sicily; but, finding no welcome there, he came (in the spring of 1675, I think) to Genoa, and obtained leave from the Genoese to choose a site in Corsica."

"And it was here he planted his colony?"

"In this very valley; but, mind you, at the price of swearing fealty to the Republic of Genoa—this and the repayment of a beggarly thousand piastres which the Republic had advanced to pay the captain of the ship which brought them, and to buy food and clothing. Very generous treatment it seemed. Yet you have heard me say before now that liberty never stands in its worst peril until the hour of success; then too often men turn her sword against her. So

these men of Lacedæmon, coming to an island where the rule of Genoa was a scourge to all except themselves, in gratitude, or for their oath's sake, took sides with the oppressor. Therefore the Corsicans, who never forget an injury, turned upon them, drove them for shelter to Ajaccio, and laid their valley desolate; nor have the Genoese power to restore them.

"Fate, Prosper, has landed you on this very spot where your kinsmen found refuge for awhile, and broke the ground, and planted orchards, hoping for a fair continuance of peace and peaceful tillage.

> "*Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum*
> *Tendimus in Latium*—

—"How will you read the omen?"

"You say," said I, "that had we found our kinsmen here we had found them in league against freedom, and friends of the tyranny we are here to fight?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, sir, let me read the omen as a lesson, and avoid my kinsmen's mistake."

My father smiled and clapped me on the shoulder. "You say little, as a rule, Prosper. It is a good fault in kings."

We walked back to the churchyard, where Mr.

Fett sat up, rubbing his eyes in the dawn, and hailed us:

"Good morning, signors! I have been dreaming that I came to a kingdom which, indeed, seemed to be an island, but on inspection proved to be a mushroom. What interpretation have you when a man dreams of mushrooms?"

"Why, this," said I, "that we passed some score of them in the meadow below. I saw them plain by the moonlight, and kicked at them to make sure."

"I did better," said Mr. Fett; "I gathered a dozen or two in my cap, foreseeing breakfast. Faith, and while you have been gadding I might have added a rasher of bacon. Did you meet any hogs on your way? But no; they turned back and took the path that appears to run up to the woods yonder."

"Hogs?" queried my father.

"They woke me, nosing and grunting among the nettles by the wall—lean, brown beasts with Homeric chines, and two or three of them huge as the Boar of Calydon. I was minded to let off my gun at 'em, but refrained upon two considerations—the first, that if they were tame, to shoot them might compromise our welcome here, and perhaps painfully, since the dimensions of the pigs appeared to argue considerable physical strength in their masters; the second,

that if wild they might be savage enough to defend themselves when attacked."

"Doubtless," said my father, "they belong to some herdsman in the forest above us, and have strayed down in search of acorns. They cannot belong to this village."

"And why, pray?"

"Because it contains not a single inhabitant. Moreover, gentlemen, while you were sleeping I have taken a pretty extensive stroll. The vineyards lie unkempt, the vines themselves unthinned, up to the edge of the forest. The olive-trees have not been tended, but have shed their fruit for years with no man to gather. Many even have cracked and fallen under the weight of their crops. But no trace of beast, wild or tame, did I discover; no dung, no signs of trampling. The valley is utterly desolate."

"It grows mushrooms," said Mr. Fett cheerfully, piling a heap of dry twigs; "and we have ship's butter and a frying-pan."

"Are you sure," asked Mr. Badcock, examining one, "that these are true mushrooms?"

"They were grown in Corsica, and have not subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles; still, *mutatis mutandis,* in my belief they are good mushrooms. If you doubt, we can easily make sure by stewing them awhile in a saucepan and stirring them with a silver

spoon, or boiling them gently with Mr. Badcock's watch, as was advised by Mr. Locke, author of the famous 'Essay on the Human Understanding.'"

"Indeed?" said my father. "The passage must have escaped me."

"It does not occur in the 'Essay.' He gave the advice at Montpellier to an English family of the name of Robinson; and had they listened to him it would have robbed Micklethwaite's 'Botany of Pewsey and Devizes' of some fascinating pages."

Mr. Fett's Story of the Fungi of Montpellier

"About the year 1677, when Mr. Locke resided at Montpellier for the benefit of his health, and while his famous 'Essay' lay as yet in the womb of futurity, there happened to be staying in the same *pension* an English family——"

"Excuse me," put in my father, "I do not quite gather where these people lodged."

"The sentence was faultily constructed, I admit. They were lodging in the same *pension* as Mr. Locke. The family consisted of a Mrs. Robinson, a widow; her son Eustace, aged seventeen; her daughter Lætitia, a child of fourteen, suffering from a slight pulmonary complaint; her son's tutor, whose name I forget for the moment, but he was a graduate of

Sidney Sussex, Cambridge, and an ardent botanist; and a good-natured English female named Maria Wilkins, an old servant whom Mrs. Robinson had brought from home—Pewsey, in Wiltshire—to attend upon this Lætitia. The Robinsons, you gather, were well-to-do; they were even well connected; albeit their social position did not quite warrant their story being included in the late Mr. Darcy Smith's 'Tragedies and Vicissitudes of Our County Families.'

"It appears that the lad Eustace, perceiving that his sister's delicate health procured her some indulgences, complained of headaches, which he attributed to a too intense application upon the 'Memorabilia' of Xenophon, and cajoled his mother into packing him off with the tutor on a holiday expedition to the neighbouring mountains of Garrigues. From this they returned two days later, about the time of *déjeuner*, with a quantity of mushrooms, which the tutor, who had discovered them, handed around for inspection, asserting them to be edible.

"The opinion of Mr. Locke being invited, that philosopher took up the position he afterwards elaborated so ingeniously, declaring that knowledge concerning these mushrooms could only be the result of experience, and suggesting that the tutor should first make proof of their innocuousness on his own person.

Upon this the tutor, a priggish youth, retorted hotly that he should hope his Cambridge studies, for which his parents had pinched themselves by many small economies, had at least taught him to discriminate between the *agarici*. Mr. Locke in vain endeavoured to divert the conversation upon the scope and objects of a university education, and fell back on suggesting that the alleged mushrooms should be stewed, and the stew stirred with a silver spoon, when, if the spoon showed no discolouration, he would take back his opinion that they contained phosphorus in appreciable quantities. He was called an empiricist for his pains; and Mrs. Robinson (who hated a dispute and invariably melted at any allusion to the tutor's *res angusta domi*) weakly gave way. The mushrooms were cooked and pronounced excellent by the entire family, of whom Mrs. Robinson expired at 8.30 that evening, the tutor at 9 o'clock, the faithful domestic Wilkins and Master Eustace shortly after midnight, and an Alsatian cook, attached to the establishment, some time in the small hours. The poor child, who had partaken but sparingly, lingered until the next noon before succumbing."

"A strange fatality!" commented Mr. Badcock.

Mr. Fett paused and eyed him awhile in frank admiration before continuing. "The wonder to me is you didn't call it a coincidence," he murmured.

"Well, and so it was," said Mr. Badcock, "only the word didn't occur to me."

"The bodies," resumed Mr. Fett, "in accordance with the by-laws of Montpellier, were conveyed to the town mortuary, and there bestowed for the time in open coffins, connected by means of wire attachments with a bell in the roof—a municipal device against premature interment. The wires also carried a number of small bells very sensitively hung, so that the smallest movement of reviving animation would at once alarm the night-watchman in an adjoining chamber.

"This watchman, an honest fellow with literary tastes above his calling, was engaged towards midnight in reading M. de la Fontaine's 'Elégie aux Nymphes de Vaux,' when a sudden, violent jangling fetched him to his feet, with every hair of his head erect and separate. Before he could collect his senses the jangling broke into a series of terrific explosions, in the midst of which the bell in the roof tolled one awful stroke and ceased.

"I leave to your imagination the sight that met his eyes when, lantern in hand, he reached the mortuary door. The collected remains, promiscuously interred next day by the municipality of Montpellier, were, at the request of a brother-in-law of Mrs. Robinson, and through the good offices of Mr. Locke,

subsequently exhumed and despatched to Pewsey, where they rest under a suitable inscription, locally attributed to the pen of Mr. Locke. His admirers will recognise in the concluding lines that conscientious exactitude which ever distinguished the philosopher. They run:

" And to the Memory of one
Fritz (? Sempach)
a Humble Native of Alsace
whose remains, by Destiny commingled
with the foregoing,
are for convenience here deposited.
II. Kings iv. 39

" But the extraordinary part of my story, gentlemen, remains to be told. Some six weeks ago, happening, in search of a theatrical engagement, to find myself in the neighbourhood of Stonehenge, I fell in with a pedestrian whose affability of accost invited me to a closer acquaintance. He introduced himself as the Reverend Josias Micklethwaite, a student of Nature, and more particularly of the mosses and lichens of Wilts. Our liking (I have reason to believe) was mutual, and we spent a delightful ten days in tracking up together the course of the Wiltshire Avon, and afterwards in perambulating the famous forest of Savernake. Here, I regret to say, a trifling request—for the loan of five shillings, a

temporary accommodation—led to a misunderstanding, and put a period to our companionship, and I remain his debtor but for some hours of profitable intercourse.

"Coming at the close of a day's ramble to Pewsey, a small town near the source of the Avon, we visited its parish churchyard and happened upon the memorial to the unfortunate Robinsons. An old man was stooping over the turf beside it, engaged in gathering mushrooms, numbers of which grew in the grass around this stone, *but nowhere else in the whole enclosure.* The old man, who proved to be the sexton, assured us not only of this, but also that previous to the interment of the Robinsons no mushrooms had grown within a mile of the spot. He added that, albeit regarded with abhorrence by the more superstitious inhabitants of Pewsey, the fungi were edible, and gave no trouble to ordinary digestions (his own, for example); nor upon close examination could Mr. Micklethwaite detect that they differed at all from the common *agaricus campestris.* So, sirs, concludes my tale."

Mr. Fett ended amid impressive silence.

"I don't feel altogether so keen-set as I did five minutes back," muttered Billy Priske.

"For my part," said Mr. Fett, anointing the gridiron with a pat of ship's butter, "I offer no

remark upon it beyond the somewhat banal one by which we have all been anticipated by Hamlet: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio——,"

"Faith, and so there are," broke in Nat Fiennes, catching me on a sudden by the arm. "Listen!"

High on the forest ridge, far and faint, yet clear over the pine-tops, a voice was singing.

The voice was a girl's—a girl's, or else some spirit's; for it fell to us out of the very dawn, pausing and anon dropping again in little cadences, as though upon the waft of wing; and wafted with it, wave upon wave, came also the morning scent of the *macchia.*

We could distinguish no words, intently though we listened, or no more than one, which sounded like *Mortù, mortù, mortù,* many times repeated in slow refrain before the voice lifted again to the air. But the air itself was voluble between its cadences, and the voice, though a woman's, seemed to challenge us on a high martial note, half-menacing, half-triumphant.

Nat Fiennes had sprung to his feet, musket in hand, when another and less romantic sound broke the silence of the near woods; and down through a glade on the slope above us, where darkness and day

yet mingled in a bluish twilight under the close boughs, came scampering back the hogs described to us by Mr. Fett. Apparently they had recovered from their fright, for they came on at a shuffling gallop through the churchyard gate, nor hesitated until well within the enclosure. There, with much grunting, they drew to a standstill and eyed us, backing a little, and sidling off by twos and threes among the nettles under the wall.

"They are tame hogs run wild," said my father, after studying them for a minute. "They have lost their masters, and evidently hope we have succeeded to the care of their troughs."

He moistened a manchet of bread from his wine-flask and flung it towards them. The hogs winced away with a squeal of alarm, then took courage and rushed upon the morsel together. The most of them were lean brutes, though here and there a fat sow ran with the herd, her dugs almost brushing the ground. In colour all were reddish-brown, and the chine of each arched itself like a bent bow. Five or six carried formidable tusks.

These tusks, I think, must have struck terror in the breast of Mr. Badcock, who, as my father enticed the hogs nearer with fresh morsels of bread until they nuzzled close to us, suddenly made a motion to beat them off with the butt of his musket, whereupon

the whole herd wheeled and scampered off through the gateway.

"Why, man," cried my father angrily, "did I not tell you they were tame! And now you have lost us good provender!" He raised his gun.

But here Nat touched his arm. "Let me follow them, sir, and see which way they take. Being so tame, they have likely enough some master or herdsman up yonder——"

"Or herdswoman," I laughed. "Take me with you, Nat."

"Nay, that I won't," he answered, with a quick blush. "You have the temper of Adonis—

"Hunting he lov'd, but love he laughed to scorn,

and I fear his fate for you, one little Adonis among so many boars!"

"Then take *me*," urged Mr. Badcock. "Indeed, sir," he apologised, turning to my father, "the movement was involuntary. I am no coward, sir, though a sudden apprehension may for the movement flush my nerves. I desire to prove to you that on second thoughts I am ready to face all the boars in Christendom."

"I did not accuse you," said my father. "But go with Mr. Fiennes if you wish."

Nat nodded, tucked his musket under his arm, and

strode out of the churchyard with Mr. Badcock at his heels. By the gateway he halted a moment and listened; but the voice sang no longer from the ridge.

We watched the pair as they went up the glade, and turned to our breakfast. The meal over, my father proposed to me to return to the creek and fetch up a three days' supply of provisions from the ship, leaving Mr. Fett and Billy Priske to guard the camp. (In our confidence of finding the valley inhabited we had brought but two pounds of ship's biscuit, one-third as much butter, and a small keg only of salt pork.)

We were absent, maybe, for two hours and a half; and on our way back fell in with Billy, who, having suffered no ill effects from his breakfast of mushrooms (though he had eaten them under protest), was roaming the meadow in search of more. We asked him if the two explorers had returned.

He answered "No," and that Mr. Fett had strolled up into the wood in search of chestnuts, leaving him sentry over the camp.

"And is it thus you keep sentry?" my father demanded.

"Why, master, since this valley has no more tenantry than Sodom or Gomorrah, cities of the plain—" Billy began confidently, but his voice trailed off under my father's frown.

"You have done ill, the pair of you," said my father, and strode ahead of us across the meadow.

At the gate of the enclosure he came to an abrupt halt.

The hogs had returned and were routing among our camp furniture. For the rest, the churchyard was empty. But where were Nat Fiennes and Mr. Badcock, who had sallied out to follow them? And where was Mr. Fett?

We rushed upon the brutes, and drove them squealing out of the gateway leading to the woods. They took the rise of the glade at a gallop, and were lost to us in the undergrowth. We followed, shouting our comrades' names. No answer came back to us, though our voices must have carried far beyond the next ridge. For an hour we beat the wood, keeping together by my father's order, and shouting, now singly, now in chorus. Nat, likely enough, had pressed forward beyond earshot, and led Mr. Badcock on with him. But what had become of Mr. Fett, who, as Billy asseverated, had promised to take but a short stroll?

My father's frown grew darker and yet darker as the minutes wore on and still no voice answered our hailing. The sun was declining fast when he gave the order to return to camp, which we found as we had left it. We seated ourselves amid the disordered

baggage, pulled out a ration apiece of salt pork and ship's bread, and ate our supper in moody silence.

During the meal Billy kept his eye furtively on my father.

"Master," said he at the close, plucking up courage as my father filled and lit a pipe of tobacco, "I be terribly to blame."

My father puffed, without answering.

"The Lord knows whether they be safe or lost," went on Billy desperately; "but we be safe, and those as can ought to sleep to-night."

Still my father gave no answer.

"I can't sleep, sir, with this on my conscience—no, not if I tried. Give me leave, sir, to stand sentry while you and Master Prosper take what sleep you may."

"I don't know that I can trust you," said my father.

"'Twas a careless act, I'll allow. But I've a-been your servant, Sir John, for twenty-two year come next Martinmas; and you know—or else you ought to know—that for your good opinion, being set to it, I would stand awake till I watched out every eye in my head."

My father crammed down the ashes in his pipe, and glanced back at the sun, now dropping into the fold of the glen between us and the sea.

"I will give you another chance," he said.

Thrice that night, my dreams being troubled, I awoke and stretched myself to see Billy pacing grimly in the moonlight between us and the gateway, tholing his penance. I know not what aroused me the fourth time; some sound perhaps. The dawn was breaking, and, half-lifted on my elbow, I saw Billy, his musket still at his shoulder, halt by the gateway as if he, too, had been arrested by the sound. After a moment he turned, quite casually, and stepped outside the gate to look.

I saw him step outside. I was but half-awake, and drowsily my eyes closed and opened again with a start, expecting to see him back at his sentry-go. He had not returned.

I closed my eyes again, in no way alarmed as yet. I would give him another minute, another sixty seconds. But before I had counted thirty my ears caught a sound, and I leapt up, wide awake, and touched my father's shoulder.

He sat up, cast a glance about him, and sprang to his feet. Together we ran to the gateway.

The voice I had heard was the grunting of the hogs. They were gathered about the gateway again, and, as before, they scampered from us up the glade.

But of Billy Priske there was no sign at all.

We stared at each other and rubbed our eyes; we

two, left alone out of our company of six. Although the sun would not pierce to the valley for another hour, it slanted already between the pine-stems on the ridge, and above us the sky was light with another day.

And again, punctual with the dawn, over the ridge a far voice broke into singing. As before, it came to us in cadences descending to a long-drawn refrain —*Mortù, mortù, mortù!*

"Billy! Billy Priske!" we called, and listened.

"*Mortù, mortù, mortù!*" sang the voice, and died away behind the ridge.

For some time we stood and heard the hogs crashing their way through the undergrowth at the head of the glade, with a snapping and crackling of twigs, which by degrees grew fainter. This, too, died away; and, returning to our camp, we sat among the baggage and stared one another in the face, questioning.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW BY MEANS OF HER SWINE I CAME TO CIRCE

So saying, I took my way up from the ship and the sea-shore. But on my way, as I drew near through the glades to the home of the enchantress Circe, there met me Hermes with his golden rod, in semblance of a lad wearing youth's bloom on his lip and all youth's charm at its heyday. He clasped my hand and spake and greeted me. "Whither away now, wretched wight, amid these mountain-summits alone and astray? And yonder in the styes of Circe, transformed to swine, thy comrades lie penned and make their lairs!"—*Odyssey*, Bk. x.

"PROSPER," said my father seriously, "we must return to the ship."

"I suppose so," I admitted; but with a rising temper, so that my tone contradicted him.

"It is most necessary. We are no longer an army, or even a legation."

"Nothing could be more evident. You may add, sir, that we are badly scared, the both of us. Yet I don't stomach sailing away, at any rate until we have discovered what has happened to the others." I cast a vicious glance up at the forest.

"Good Lord, child!" my father exclaimed. "Who was suggesting it?"

"You spoke of returning to the ship."

"To be sure I did. She can work round to Ajaccio and repair. She will arrive evidently from the verge of total wreck, an ordinary trader in ballast, with nothing suspicious about her. No questions will be asked that Pomery cannot invent an answer for off-hand. She will be allowed to repair, refit, and sail for reinforcements."

"Reinforcements? But where will you find reinforcements?"

"I must rely on Gervase to provide them. Meanwhile we have work on hand. To begin with, we must clear up this mystery, which may oblige us to camp here for some time."

"O—oh!" said I.

"You do not suggest, I hope, that we can abandon our comrades, whatever has befallen them?"

"My dear father!" I protested.

"Tut, lad! I never supposed it of you. Well, it seems to me we are more likely to clear up the mystery by sitting still than by beating the woods. Do you agree?"

"To be sure," said I, "we may spare ourselves the trouble of searching for it."

"I propose then, as our first move, that we step down to the ship together and pack Captain Pomery off to Ajaccio with his orders——"

"Excuse me, sir," I interrupted. "*You* shall step down to the ship, while I wait here and guard the camp."

"My dear Prosper," said he, "I like the spirit of that offer: but upon my word I hope you won't persist in it. These misadventures, if I may confess it, get me on the raw, and I cannot leave you here alone without feeling damnably anxious."

"Trust me, sir," I answered, "I shall be at least as uncomfortable until you return. But I have an inkling that—whatever the secret may be, and whether we surprise it or it surprises us—it will wait until we are separated. Moreover, I have a theory to test. So far every man has disappeared outside the churchyard here and somewhere on the side of the forest. The camp itself has been safe enough, and so have the meadow and the path down to the creek. You will remember that Billy was roaming the meadow for mushrooms at the very time we lost Mr. Fett: yet Billy came to no harm. To be sure the enemy, having thinned us down to two, may venture more boldly; but if I keep the camp here while you take the path down to the creek, and nothing happens to either, we shall be narrowing the zone of danger, so to speak."

My father nodded. "You will promise me not to set foot outside the camp?"

"I will promise more," said I. "At the smallest warning I am going to let off my piece. You must not be annoyed if I fetch you back on a false alarm or even an absurd one. I shall sit here with my musket across my knees, and half a dozen others, all loaded, close around me: and at the first sign of something wrong—at the crackling of a twig, maybe —I shall fire. You, on your way to the creek, will keep your eyes just as wide open and fire at the first hint of danger."

"I don't like it," my father persisted.

"But you see the wisdom of it," said I. "We must stay here: that's agreed. So long as we stay here we shall be desperately uncomfortable, fearing we don't know what: that also is agreed. Then, say I, for God's sake let us clear this business up and get it over."

My father nodded, stood up, and shouldered his piece. I knew that his eyes were on me and avoided meeting them, afraid for a moment that he was going to say something in praise of my courage, whereas in truth I was horribly scared. That last word or two had really expressed my terror. I desired nothing but to get the whole thing over. My hand shook so as I turned to load the first musket that I had twice to shorten my grasp of the ramrod before I could insert it in the barrel.

From the gateway leading to the lane my father watched till the loading was done. "Good-bye and good luck, lad!" said he and turned to go. A pace or two beyond the gateway he halted as if to add a word, but thought better of it and resumed his stride. His footsteps sounded hollow between the walls of the narrow lane. Then he reached the turf of the meadow, and the sound ceased suddenly.

I wanted—wanted desperately—to break down and run after him. By a bodily effort—something like a long pull on a rope—I held myself steady and braced my back against the bole of the ilex-tree which I had chosen because it gave a view through the gateway towards the forest. Upon this opening and the glade beyond it I kept my eyes, for the first minute or two scarcely venturing to wink, only relaxing the strain now and again for a cautious glance to right and left around the deserted enclosure. I could hear my heart working like a pump.

The enclosure—indeed the whole valley—lay deadly silent in the growing heat of the morning. On the hidden summit behind the wood a raven croaked; and as the sun mounted, a pair of buzzards, winging their way to the mountains, crossed its glare and let fall a momentary trace of shadow that touched my nerves as with a whip. But few birds haunt the Corsican bush, and to-day even these woods

and this watered valley were dumb of song. No breeze sent a shiver through the grey ilexes or the still paler olives in the orchard to my right. On the slope the chestnut-trees massed their foliage in heavy plumes of green, plume upon plume, wave upon wave, a still cascade of verdure held between jagged ridges of granite. Here and there the granite pushed a bare pinnacle above the trees, and over these pinnacles the air swam and quivered.

The minutes dragged by. A caterpillar let itself down by a thread from the end of the bough under which I sat, in a direct line between me and the gateway. Very slowly while I watched him he descended for a couple of feet, swayed a little, and hung still, as if irresolute. A butterfly, after hovering for a while over the wall's dry coping, left it and fluttered aimlessly across the garth, vanishing at length into the open doorway of the church.

The church stood about thirty paces from my tree, and by turning my head to the angle of my right shoulder I looked straight into its porch. It struck me that from the shadow within it, or from one of the narrow windows, a marksman could make an easy target of me. The building had been empty overnight: no one (it was reasonable to suppose) had entered the enclosure during Billy's sentry-go; no one for a certainty had entered it since. Nevertheless

the fancy that eyes might be watching me from within the church began now to worry, and within five minutes had almost worried me into leaving my post to explore.

I repressed the impulse. I could not carry my stand of muskets with me, and to leave it unguarded would be the starkest folly. Also I had sworn to myself to keep watch on the gateway towards the forest, and this resolution must obviously be broken if I explored the church. I kept my seat, telling myself that however the others had vanished they had vanished in silence, and therefore all danger from gun-shot might be ruled out of the reckoning.

I had scarcely calmed myself by these reflections when a noise at some distance up the glade fetched my musket half-way to my shoulder. I lowered it with a short laugh of relief as our friends the hogs came trotting down-hill to the gateway.

For the moment I was glad; on second thoughts, vexed. They explained the noise and eased my immediate fear. They brought back—absurd as it may sound—a sense of companionship: for although half-wild, they showed a disposition to be sociable, and we had found that a wave of the arm sufficed to drive them off when their advances became embarrassing. On the other hand they would certainly distract some attention which I could very ill afford to spare.

But again I calmed myself, reflecting that if any danger lurked close at hand, these friendly nuisances might give me some clue to it by their movements. They came trotting down to the entrance, halted, and regarded me, pushing up their snouts and grunting as though uncertain of their welcome. Apparently reassured, they charged through, as hogs will, in a disorderly mob, rubbing their lean flanks against the gateposts, each seeming to protest with squeals against the crush to which he contributed.

One or two of the boldest came running towards me in the hope of being fed; but, seeing that I made no motion, swerved as though their courage failed them and stood regarding me sideways with their grotesque little eyes. Finding me still unresponsive, they began to nose in the dried grasses with an affected unconcern which set me smiling, it seemed so humanlike a pretence under rebuff. The rest, as usual, dispersed under the trees and along the nettle-beds by the wall. It occurred to me that, if I let these gentlemen work round to my rear, they might distract my attention—perhaps at an awkward moment—by nosing up to the forage-bags or upsetting the camp furniture, so with a wave of my musket I headed them back. They took the hint obediently enough and, wheeling about, fell to rooting between me and the entrance. So I sat maybe for another

five minutes, still keeping my main attention on the gateway, but with an occasional glance to right and left, to detect and warn back any fresh attempt to work round my flanks.

Now in the act of waving my musket I had happened to catch sight of one remarkably fine hog among the nettles, who, taking alarm with the rest, had winced away and disappeared in the rear of the church, where a narrow alley ran between it and the churchyard wall. If he followed this alley to its end, he would come into sight again around the apse and almost directly on my right flank. I kept my eye lifting towards this corner of the building, waiting for him to reappear, which by and by he did, and with a truly porcine air of minding his own business and that only.

His unconcern was so admirably affected that, to test it, instead of waving him back I lifted my musket very quietly, almost without shifting my position, and brought the butt against my shoulder.

He saw the movement; for at once, even with his head down in the grasses, he hesitated and came to a full stop. Suddenly as my fingers felt for the trigger-guard my heart began to beat like a hammer.

There lay my danger; and in a flash I knew it, but not the extent of it. This was no hog, but a man; by the start and the quick-arrested pose in

which the brute faced me, still with his head low and his eyes regarding me from the grasses, I felt sure of him. But what of the others? Were they also men? If so, I was certainly lost, but I dared not turn my eyes for a glance at them. With a sudden and most natural grunt the brute backed a little, shook his head in disgust, and sidled towards the angle of the building. "Now or never," thought I, and pulled the trigger.

As the musket kicked against me I felt—I could not see—the rest of the hogs swerve in a common panic and break for the gateway. Their squealing took up the roar of the report and protracted it. They were real hogs, then.

I caught up a second musket and, to make sure, let fly into the mass of them as they choked the gateway. Then, without waiting to see the effect of this shot, I snatched musket number three, and ran through the drifting smoke to where my first victim lay face-downwards in the grasses, his swine's mask bowed upon the forelegs crossed—as a man crosses his arms—inwards from the elbow. As I ran he lifted himself in agony on his knees—a man's knees. I saw a man's hand thrust through the paunch, ripping it asunder; and, struggling so, he rolled slowly over upon his back and lay still. I stooped and tore the mask away. A black-avised face stared up at

me, livid beneath its sunburn, with filmed eyes. The eyes stared at me unwinking as I slipped his other hand easily out of its case, which, even at close view, marvellously resembled the cleft, narrow hoof of a hog. I could not disengage him further, his feet being strapped into the disguise with tight leathern thongs; but, having satisfied myself that he was past help, I turned on a quick thought to the gateway again, and ran.

A second hog—a real hog—lay stretched there on its side, dead as a nail. Its companions, scampering in panic, had by this time almost reached the head of the glade. Forgetting my promise to my father, I started in pursuit. The thought in my mind was that, if I kept them in sight, they would lead me to my comrades; a chance unlikely to return.

The glade ran up between two contracting spurs of the hill. As I climbed, the belt of woodland narrowed on either side of the track, until the side-valley ended in a cross ridge where the chestnuts suddenly gave place to pines and the turf to a rocky soil carpeted with pine-needles. Here, in the spaces between the tree-trunks, I caught my last glimpse of the hogs as two or three of the slowest ran over the ridge and disappeared. I followed, sure of getting sight of them from the summit. But here I found myself tricked. Beyond the ridge lay a short dip—short,

that is, as a bird flies. Not more than fifty yards ahead the slope rose again, strewn with granite boulders and piled masses of granite such as in Cornwall we call "tors"; and clear away to the mountain tops stretched a view with never a tree, but a few outstanding bushes only. Yet from ridge to ridge green vegetation filled every hollow, and in the hollow between me and the nearest the hogs were lost.

I heard, however, their grunting and the snapping of boughs in the undergrowth: and in that clear delusive air it seemed but three minutes' work to reach the next ridge. I followed then, confidently enough—and made my first acquaintance with the Corsican *macchia* by plunging into a cleft twenty feet deep between two rocks of granite. I did not actually fall more than a third of the distance, for I saved myself by clutching at a clematis which laced its coils, thick as a man's wrist, across the cleft. But I know that the hole cannot have been less than twenty feet deep, for I had to descend to the bottom of it to recover my musket.

That fall committed me, too. Within five minutes of my first introduction to the *macchia* I had learnt how easily a man may be lost in it; and in less than half of five minutes I had lost not only my way but my temper. To pursue after the hogs was nearly hopeless: all sound of them was swal-

lowed up in the tangle of scrub. Yet I held on, crawling through thickets of lentisk, tangling my legs in creepers, pushing my head into clumps of cactus, here tearing my hands and boots on sharp granite, there ripping my clothes on prickly thorns. Once I found what appeared to be a goat-track. It led to another cleft of rock where, beating down the briers, I looked down a chasm which ended, thirty feet below, in a whole brake of cacti. The scent of the crushed plants was divine: and I crushed a plenty of them.

After a struggle which must have lasted from twenty minutes to half an hour I gained the ridge which had seemed but three minutes away, and there sat down to a silent lesson in geography. I had given up all hope of following the hogs or discovering my comrades. I knew now what it means to search for a needle in a bottle of hay, but with many prickles I had gathered some wisdom and learnt that, whether I decided to go forward or to retreat, I must survey the *macchia* before attempting it again.

To go forward without a clue would be folly, as well as unfair to my father, whom my two shots must have alarmed. I decided therefore to retreat, but first to mount a craggy pile of granite some fifty yards on my left, which would give me not only a

better survey of the bush but perhaps even a view over the tree-tops and down upon the bay where the *Gauntlet* lay at anchor. If so, by the movements on board I might learn whether or not my father had reached her with his commands before taking my alarm.

The crags were not easy to climb: but, having hitched the musket in my bandolier, I could use both hands, and so pulled myself up by the creepers which festooned the rock here and there in swags as thick as the *Gauntlet's* hawser. Disappointment met me on the summit. The trees allowed me but sight of the blue horizon; they still hid the shores of the bay and our anchorage. My eminence, however, showed me a track, fairly well defined, crossing the *macchia* and leading back to the wood.

I was conning this when a shout in my rear fetched me right-about face. Towards me, down and across the farther ridge, I saw a man running—Nat Fiennes!

He had caught sight of me on my rock against the sky-line, and as he ran he waved his arms frantically, motioning to me to run also for the woods. I could see no pursuer; but still, as he came on, his arms waved, and were waving yet when a bush on the chine above him threw out a little puff of grey smoke. Toppling headlong into the bushes, he was

lost to me even before the report rang on my ears across the hollow.

I dropped on my knees for a grip on the creepers, swung myself down the face of the crag, and within ten seconds was lost in the *macchia* again, fighting my way through it to the spot where Nat lay. Wherever the scrub parted and allowed me a glimpse I kept my eye on the bush above the chine; and so with torn clothes and face and hands bleeding, crossed the dip, mounted the slope, and emerged upon a ferny hollow ringed about on three sides with the *macchia*. There face-downward in the fern lay Nat, shot through the lungs.

I lifted him against one knee. His eyelids flickered and his lips moved to speak, but a rush of blood choked him. Still resting him against my knee, I felt behind me for my musket. The flint was gone from the lock, dislodged no doubt by a blow against the crags. With one hand I groped on the ground for a stone to replace it. My fingers found only a tangle of dry fern, and, glancing up at the ridge, I stared straight along the barrel of a musket. At the same moment a second barrel glimmered out between the bushes on my left. *"Signore, favorisca di rendersi,"* said a voice, very quiet and polite. I stared around me, hopeless, at bay: and while I stared and clutched my useless gun, from behind a rock some

twenty paces up the slope a girl stepped forward, halted, rested the butt of her musket on the stone, and, crossing her hands above the nozzle of it, calmly regarded us.

Even in my rage her extraordinary wild beauty held me at gaze for a moment. She wore over a loose white shirt a short waist-tunic of faded green velvet, with a petticoat or kilt of the same reaching a little below her knees, from which to the ankles her legs were cased in tight-fitting leathern gaiters. Her stout boots shone with toe-plates of silver or polished steel. A sad-coloured handkerchief protected her head, its edge drawn straight across her brow in a fashion that would have disfigured ninety-nine women in a hundred. But no head-dress availed to disfigure that brow or the young imperious eyes beneath it. "Are you a friend of this man?" she asked in Italian.

"He is my best friend," I answered her in the same language. "Why have you done this to him?"

She seemed to consider for a moment, thoughtfully, without pity.

"I can talk to you in French if you find it easier," she said after a pause.

"You may use Italian," I answered angrily. "I can understand it more easily than you will use it to explain why you have done this wickedness."

"He was very foolish," she said. "He tried to run away. And you were all very foolish to come as you did. We saw your ship while you were yet four leagues at sea. How have you come here?"

"I came here," answered I, "being led by your hogs, and after shooting an assassin in disguise of a hog."

"You have killed Giuseppe?"

"I did my best," said I, turning and addressing myself to three Corsicans who had stepped from the bushes around me. "But whatever your purpose may be, you have shot my friend here, and he is dying. If you have hearts, deal tenderly with him, and afterwards we can talk."

"He says well," said the girl slowly, and nodded to the three men. "Lift him and bring him to the camp." She turned to me. "You will not resist?" she asked.

"I will go with my friend," said I.

"That is good. You may walk behind me," she said, turning on her heel. "I am glad to have met one who talks in Italian, for the rest of your friends can only chatter in English, a tongue which I do not understand. Step close behind me, please; for the way is narrow. For what are you waiting?"

"To see that my friend is tenderly handled," I answered.

"He is past helping," said she carelessly. "He behaved foolishly. You did not stop for Giuseppe, did you?"

"I did not."

"I am not blaming you," said she, and led the way.

CHAPTER XV

I BECOME HOSTAGE TO THE PRINCESS CAMILLA

> Silvis te, Tyrrhene, feras agitare putasti?
> Advenit qui vestra dies muliebribus armis
> Verba redarguerit.
>
> —Virgil, *Æneid*, xi.

Ahead of us, beyond the rises and hollows of the *macchia*, rose a bare mountain summit, not very tall, the ascent to it broken by granite ledges, so that from a distance it almost appeared to be terraced. On a heathery slope at the foot of the first terrace the Corsicans set down poor Nat and spoke a word to their mistress, who presently halted and exchanged a few sentences with them in *patois*; whereupon they stepped back a few paces into the *macchia*, and, having quickly cut a couple of ilex-staves, fell to plaiting them with lentisk, to form a litter.

While this was doing I stepped back to my friend's side. His eyes were closed; but he breathed yet, and his pulse, though faint, was perceptible. A little blood—a very little—trickled from the corner of his mouth. I glanced at the girl, who had drawn near and stood close at my elbow.

"Have you a surgeon in your camp?" I asked. "I believe that a surgeon might save him yet."

She shook her head. I could detect no pity in her eyes; only a touch of curiosity, half haughty and in part sullen. "I doubt," she answered, "if you will find a surgeon in all Corsica. I do not believe in surgeons."

"Then," said I, "you have not lived always in Corsica."

Her face flushed darkly, even while the disdain in her eyes grew colder, more guarded.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Why," said I, "you are not one, I believe, to speak so positively in mere ignorance. But see!" I went on, pointing down upon the bay over which this higher slope gave us a clear view, "there goes the ship that brought us here."

She gazed at it for a while, with bent brow, evidently puzzled.

"No," said I, watching her, "I shall not tell you yet why she goes, nor where her port lies. But I have something to propose to you."

"Say it."

"It leaves one man behind, and one only, in our camp below. He is my father, and he has some knowledge of surgery; I believe he could save my friend here."

She stood considering. "So much was known to me," she answered at length; "that, after you, there would be but one left. Three of my men have gone down to take him. He will be here before long."

"But, pardon me—for as yet I know not whether your aim is to kill us or take us alive——"

She interrupted me with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "I have no wish to kill you. But I must know what brings you here, and the rest can talk nothing but English. As for this one"—with a gesture of the hand towards Nat—"he was foolish. He tried to run away and warn you."

"Then, signorina, let me promise, who know my father, that you will not take him alive."

"I have sent three men."

"You had done better to send thirty; but even so you will not succeed."

"I have heard tell," she said, again with a little movement of her shoulders, "that all Englishmen are mad."

I laughed; and this laugh of mine had a singular effect on her. She drew back and looked at me for an instant with startled eyes, as though she had never heard laughter in her life before, or else had heard too much. "Tell me what you propose," she said.

"I propose to send down a message to my father, and one of your men shall carry it with a white

flag (for that he shall have the loan of my handkerchief). I will write in Italian, that you may read and know what I say."

"It is unnecessary."

"I thank you." I found in my pockets the stump of a pencil and a scrap of paper—an old Oxford bill—and wrote:

DEAR FATHER,—We are prisoners, and Nat is wounded, but whether past help or not I cannot say. I believe you might do something for him. If it suit your plans, the bearer will give you safe-conduct: if not, I remain your obedient son PROSPER.

I translated this for her, and folded the paper.

"Marc'antonio!" she called to one of the three men, who by this time had finished plaiting the litter and were strewing it with fern.

Marc'antonio—a lean, slight fellow with an old scar on his cheek—stepped forward at once. She gave him my note and handkerchief with instructions to hurry.

"Excuse me, principessa"—he hesitated, with a glance at me and another at his comrades—"but these two, with the litter, will have their hands full; and this prisoner is a strong one and artful. Has he not already slain 'l Verro?"

"You will mind your own business, Marc'antonio, which is to run as I tell you."

The man turned without another word, but with a last distrustful look, and plunged down-hill into the scrub. The girl made a careless sign to the others to lay Nat on his litter and, turning, led the way up the rocky front of the summit, presenting her back to me, choosing the path which offered fewest impediments to the litter-bearers in our rear.

The sun was now high overhead, and beat torridly upon the granite crags, which, as I clutched them, blistered my hands. The girl and the two men (in spite of their burden) balanced themselves and sprang from foothold to foothold with an ease which shamed me. For a while I supposed that we were making for the actual summit; but on the second terrace my captress bore away to the left and led us by a track that slanted across the northern shoulder of the ridge. A sentry started to his feet and stepped from behind a clump of arid sage-coloured bushes, stood for a moment with the sun glinting on his gun-barrel, and at a sign from the girl dropped back upon his post. Just then, or a moment later, my ears caught the jigging notes of a flute; whereby I knew Mr. Badcock to be close at hand, for it was discoursing the tune of "The Vicar of Bray"!

Sure enough as we rounded the slope we came upon him, Mr. Fett, and Billy Priske, the trio seated

within a semicircle of admiring Corsicans and above a scene so marvellous that I caught my breath. The slope, breaking away to north and east, descended sheer upon a vast amphitheatre filled with green acres of pine forest and pent within walls of porphyry that rose in tower upon tower, pinnacle upon pinnacle, beyond and above the tree-tops; and these pillars, as they soared out of the gulf, seemed to shake off with difficulty the forest that climbed after them, holding by every nook and ledge in their riven sides—here a dark-foliaged clump caught in a chasm, there a solitary trunk bleached and dead but still hanging by a last grip.

On the edge of this green cauldron the Corsicans and my comrades sat like so many witches, their figures magnified uncannily against the void; and far beyond, above the rose-coloured crags, deep-set in miles of transparent blue, shone the snow-covered central peaks of the island.

As I rounded the corner Mr. Fett hailed me with a shout and a vocal imitation of a post-horn.

"Another!" he cried, and slapped his thigh triumphantly. "Another blossom added to the posy! Badcock, my flosculet, you owe me five shillings. Permit me to explain, sir"—he turned to me—"that Mr. Badcock has been staking upon an anthology, I upon the full basket and the whole hog. It is cut

and come again with these Corsicans; and, talking of hogs——"

His chatter tailed off in a pitiful exclamation as the litter-carriers came around the angle of the ridge with Nat's body between them.

"Poor lad! Ah, poor lad!" I heard Billy say. Mr. Badcock nervously disjointed his flute. "I warned him, sir. Believe me, my last words were that, being in Rome, so to speak, he should do as the Romans did——"

"There is one more," announced the girl to her Corsicans, "and I have sent for him. He will come under conduct; and, meanwhile, I have to say that any man who offers to harm this prisoner, here, will be shot."

"But why should we harm him, principessa?" they asked; and, indeed, I felt inclined to echo their question, seeing that she pointed at me.

"Because he has killed Giuseppe?" she answered simply.

"Giuseppe? He has slain Giuseppe?" The simultaneous cry went up in a wail, and by impulse the hand of each one moved to his knife.

"Your pardon, principessa—" began one black-avised bandit, dropping the haft of his knife and feeling for the gun at his back.

She waved him aside and turned to me. "I should warn you, sir, that we are of one clan here,

though I may not tell you our name; and against the slayer of one it is vendetta with us all. But I spare you until your father arrives."

"I thank you," answered I, feeling blue, but fetching up my best bow. Here was a pleasant prospect! "I only beg to observe that I killed this man —if I have killed him—in self-defence," I added.

"Do you wish me to repeat that as your plea?" she asked, half in scorn.

"I do not," said I with a sudden rush of anger. "Moreover, I dare say that these savages of yours would see no distinction."

"You are right," she replied carelessly, "they would see no distinction."

"But excuse me, principessa," persisted the scowling man, "a feud is a feud, and if he has slain our Giusè——"

"Attend to me, sir," I broke in. "Your Giuseppe came at me like a hog, and I gave him his deserts. For the rest, if you move your hand another inch towards that gun I will knock your brains out." I clubbed my musket ready to strike.

"Gently, sir!" interposed the girl. "This is folly, as you must see."

I shrugged my shoulders. "You will allow me, Princess. If it come to vendetta, you have slain my friend."

She gave her back to me and faced the ring. "I tell you," she said, "that Giuseppe's death rests on the prisoner's word alone. Marc'antonio and Stephanu have gone down and will bring us the truth of it. Meanwhile I say that this one is our prisoner, like as the others. Give him room and let him wait by his friend. Does any one say 'nay' to that?" she demanded.

The scowling man, with a glance at his comrades' faces, gave way. I could not have told why, but from the start of the dispute I felt that this girl held her bandits, or whatever they were, in imperfect obedience. They obeyed her, yet with reserve. When pressed to the point between submission and mutiny, they yielded; but they yielded with a consent which I could not reconcile with submission. Even whilst answering deferentially they appeared to be looking at one another and taking a cue.

For the time, however, she had prevailed with them. They stood aside while Billy and I lifted the litter and bore it to the shade of an overhanging rock. One even fetched me a panful of water which he had collected from a trickling spring on the face of the cliffs hard by, and brought me linen, too, when he saw me preparing to tear up my own shirt to bind Nat's wound.

We could not trace the course of the bullet, and

judged it best to spare meddling with a hurt we could not help. So, having bathed away the clotted blood and bandaged him, we strewed a fresh bed of fern and watched by him, moistening his lips from time to time with water, for which he moaned. The sun began to sink on the far side of the mountain, and the shadow of the summit, falling into the deep gulf at our feet, to creep across the green tree-tops massed there. While it crept and I watched it, Billy related in whispers how he had been sprung upon and gagged, so swiftly that he had no chance to cry alarm or to feel for the trigger of his musket. He rubbed his hands delightedly when in return I told the story of my lucky shot. In his ignorance of Italian he had caught no inkling of the peril that lucky shot had brought upon me, nor did I for the moment choose to enlighten him.

The shadow of the mountain was stretching more than half-way across the valley, and in the slanting light the rosy tinge of the crags appeared to be melting and suffusing the snow-peaks beyond, when my father walked into the camp unannounced. He carried a gun and a folding camp-stool, and was followed by Marc'antonio, who fluttered my white handkerchief from the ramrod of his musket.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen!" said he, lifting his hat and looking about him.

I could see at a glance that his stature and bearing impressed the Corsicans mightily. They drew back for a moment, then pressed around him like children.

"Mbè! E bellu, il Inglese," I heard one say to his fellow.

After quelling the brief tumult against me, and while I busied myself with Nat, the girl had disappeared—I could not tell whither. But now one of the band ran up the slope calling loudly to summon her. "O principessa, ajo, ajo! Veni qui, ajo!" and, gazing after him, I saw her at the entrance of a cave some fifty feet above us, erect, with either hand parting and holding back the creepers that curtained her bower.

She let the curtains fall-to behind her, and, stepping down the hillside, welcomed my father with the gravest of curtsies.

"Salutation, O stranger!"

"And to you, O lady, salutation!" my father made answer with a bow. "Though English," he went on, slipping easily into the dialect she used with her followers, "I am Corsican enough to forbear from asking their names of gentlefolk in the *macchia*; but mine is John Constantine, and I am very much at your service."

"My men call me the Princess Camilla."

"A good name," said my father, and seemed to

muse upon it for a moment while he eyed her paternally. "A very good name, O Princess, and beloved of old by Diana—

> "Æternum telorum et virginitatis amorem
> Intemerata——

But I come at your bidding and must first of all apologise for some little delay; the cause being that your messenger found me busy patching up a bullet-hole in one of your men."

"Giuseppe is not dead?"

"He is not dead, and on the whole I incline to think he is not going to die, though you will allow me to say that the rogue deserved it. The other three gentlemen-at-arms despatched by you are at this moment bringing him up the hill, very carefully, following my instructions. He will need care. In fact it will be touch-and-go with him for many days to come."

While he talked, my father, catching sight of me, had stepped to Nat's couch. Nodding to me without more ado to lift the patient and cut away his shirt, he knelt, unrolled his case of instruments, and with a "Courage, lad!" bent an ear to the faint breathing. In less than a minute, as it seemed, his hand, feeling around the naked back, came to a pause a little behind and under the right arm-pit.

"Courage, lad!" he repeated. "A little pain, and we'll have it, safe as a wasp in an apple."

The Corsicans under his orders had withdrawn to a little distance and stood about us in a ring. While he probed and Nat's poor body writhed feebly in my arms, I lifted my eyes once with a shudder, and met the Princess Camilla's. She was watching, and without a tremor, her face grave as a child's.

With a short grunt of triumph, my father caught away his hand, dipped it swiftly into the pan of water beside him, and held the bullet aloft between thumb and forefinger. The Corsicans broke into quick guttural cries, as men hailing a miracle. As Nat's head fell back limp against my shoulder I saw the Princess turn and walk away alone.

Her followers dispersed by degrees, but not (I should say) until every man had explained to every other his own theory of the wound and the operation, and how my father had come to find the bullet so unerringly, each theorist tapping his own chest and back, or his interlocutor's, sometimes a couple tapping each other with vigour, neither listening, both jabbering at full pitch of the voice with prodigious elisions of consonants and equally prodigious drawlings of the vowels. For us, the dressing of the wound kept us busy, and we paid little attention even

when a fresh jabbering announced that the litter-bearers had arrived with Giuseppe.

By and by, however, my father rose from his knees and, leaving me to fasten the last bandages, strolled across the slope to see how his other patient had borne the journey. Just at that moment I heard again a voice calling to the Princess Camilla: "Ajo, ajo! O principessa, veni qui!" and simultaneously the voice of Billy Priske uplifted in an incongruous British oath.

My father halted with a gesture of annoyance, checked himself, and, awaiting the Princess, pointed towards an object on the turf—an object at which Billy Priske, too, was pointing.

It appeared that while his comrades had been attending on Giuseppe, the third Corsican (whom they called Stè, or Stephanu) had filled up his time by rifling our camp; and of all our possessions he had chosen to select our half-dozen spare muskets and a burst coffer, from which he now extracted and (for his comrades' admiration) held aloft our chiefest treasure—the Iron Crown of Corsica.

"Princess," said my father coldly, "your men have broken faith. I came to you under no compulsion, obeying your flag of truce. It was no part of the bargain that our camp should be pillaged."

For a while she did not seem to hear; but stood at gaze, her eyes round with wonder.

"Stephanu, bring it here," she commanded.

The man brought it. "O principessa," said he with a wondering grin, "who are these that travel with royal crowns? If we were true folk of the *macchia*, now, we could hold them at a fine ransom."

She took the crown, examined it for a moment, and, turning to my father, spoke to him swiftly in French:

"How came you by this, O Englishman?"

"That," answered my father stiffly, "I decline to tell you. It has come to your hands, Princess, through violation of your flag of truce, and in honour you should restore it to me without question."

She waved a hand impatiently. "This is the crown of King Theodore, O Englishman. See the rim of mingled oak and laurel, made in imitation of that hasty chaplet wherewith the Corsicans first crowned him in the Convent of Alesani. Answer me, and in French, for all your lives depend on it; yet briefly, for the sound of that tongue angers my men. For your life, then, how did you come by this?"

"You must find some better argument, Princess," said my father stiffly.

"For your son's life then."

I saw my father lift his eyes and scan her beautiful face.

"My son is not a coward, Princess; the less so that—" Here my father hesitated.

"Quickly, quickly!" she urged him.

He threw up his head. "Yes, quickly, Princess; and in no fear, nor upon any condition. You are islanders; therefore you are patriots. You are patriots; therefore you hate the Genoese and love the Queen Emilia, whose servant I am. As I was saying, then, my son has the less excuse to be a coward in that he hopes, one day, with the Queen Emilia's blessing, to wear this crown bequeathed to him by the late King Theodore."

"*He?*" The girl swung upon me, scornfully incredulous.

"Even he, Princess. In proof I can show you King Theodore's deed of gift, signed with his own hand and attested."

For the first time, then, I saw her smile; but the smile held no correspondence with the tone of slow, quiet contempt in which she next spoke.

"You are trustful, O sciù Johann Constantine. I have heard that all Englishmen tell the truth, and expect it, and are otherwise mad."

"I trust to nothing, Princess, until I have the Queen Emilia's word. That I would trust to my life's end."

She nodded darkly. "You shall go to her—if you can find her."

"Tell me where to seek her."

"She lies at Nonza in Capo Corse; or peradventure the Genoese, who hold her prisoner, have by this time carried her across to the Continent."

"Though she were in Genoa itself, I would deliver her or die."

"You will probably die, O Englishman, before you receive her answer; and that will be a pity—yes, a great pity. But you are free to go, you and your company—all but your son here, this King of Corsica that is to be, whom I keep as hostage, with his crown. Eh? Is this not a good bargain I offer you?"

"Be it good or bad, Princess," my father answered, "to make a bargain takes two."

"That is true," said I, stepping forward with a laugh, and thrusting myself between the Corsicans, who had begun to press around with decided menace in their looks. "And therefore the Princess will accept me as the other party to the bargain, and as her hostage."

Again at the sound of my laugh she shrank a little; but presently frowned.

"Have you considered, cavalier," she asked coldly, "that Giuseppe is not certain of recovery?"

"Still less certain is my friend," answered I, and with a shrug of the shoulders walked away to Nat's

sick-couch. There, twenty minutes later, my father took leave of me, after giving some last instructions for the care of the invalid. In one hand he carried his musket, in the other his camp-stool.

"Say the word even now, lad," he offered, "and we will abide till he recovers."

But I shook my head.

Billy Priske carried an enormous wine-skin slung across his shoulders; Mr. Fett a sack of provender. Mr. Badcock had begged or borrowed or purchased an enormous gridiron.

"But what is that for?" I asked him as we shook hands.

"For cooking the wild goose," he answered solemnly, "which in these parts (as I am given to understand) is an animal they call the *mufflone*. He partakes in some degree of the nature of a sheep. He will find me his match, sir."

One by one, a little before the sun sank, they bade me farewell and passed—free men—down the path that dipped into the pine forest. On the edge of the dip each man turned and waved a hand to me. The Princess, with Marc'antonio beside her, stood and watched them as they passed out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOREST HUT

Then hooly, hooly rase she up,
And hooly she came nigh him,
And when she drew the curtain by—
"Young man, I think you're dyin'."
—*Barbara Allan's Cruelty.*

Evening fell, filling the great hollow of a sudden with purple shadows. As the stars came out the Corsicans on the slope to my left lit a fire of brushwood and busied themselves around it cooking their supper. They were no ordinary bandits, then; or at least had no fear to betray their whereabouts, since on the landward side on so clear a night the glow would be visible for many miles.

I watched them at their preparations. Their dark figures moved between me and the flames as they set up a tall tripod of pine poles and hung their cauldron from the centre of it, upon a brandice. The Princess had withdrawn to her cave and did not reappear until Stephanu, who seemed to be head-cook, announced that supper was ready, whereupon she came and took her seat with the rest in a ring around

the fire. Marc'antonio brought me my share of seethed kid's flesh with a capful of chestnuts roasted in the embers; a flask of wine too, and a small pail of goat's milk with a pannikin, for Nat. The fare might not be palatable, but plainly they did not intend us to starve.

Marc'antonio made no answer when I thanked him, but returned to his seat in the ring, where from the beginning of the meal—as at a signal—his companions had engaged in a furious and general dispute. So at least it sounded, and so shrill at times were their contending voices, and so fierce their gesticulations, that for some minutes I fully expected to see them turn to other business the knives with which they attacked their meal.

The Princess sat listening, speaking very seldom. Once only in a general hush the firelight showed me that her lips were moving, and I caught the low tone of her voice, but not the words. Not once did she look in my direction, and yet I guessed that she was speaking of me: for the words " ostagiu," " Inglese " and the name " Giuseppe " or " Giusè "—of the man I had shot—had recurred over and over in their jabber, and recurred when she ceased and it broke forth again.

It had lasted maybe for half an hour, when at a signal from Marc'antonio (whom I took to be the

Princess's lieutenant or spokesman in these matters, and to whom she turned oftener than to any of the others, except perhaps Stephanu) two or three picked up their muskets, looked to their priming, and walked off into the darkness. By and by came in the sentinels they had relieved, and these in turn were helped by Stephanu to supper from the cauldron. I watched, half-expecting the dispute to start afresh, but the others appeared to have taken their fill of it with their food; and soon, each man drawing his blanket over his head, lay back and stretched themselves to sleep. The new-comers, having satisfied their hunger, did likewise. Stephanu gave the great pot a stir, unhitched it from the brandice, and bore it away, leaving the Princess and Marc'antonio the only two wakeful ones beside the fire.

They sat so long without speaking, the Princess with knees drawn up, hands clasping them, and eyes bent on the embers into which (for the Corsican nights are chilly) Marc'antonio now and again cast a fresh brand—that in time my own eyes began to grow heavy. They were smarting, too, from the smoke of the burnt wood. Nat had fallen into a troubled sleep, in which now and again he moaned: and always at the sound I roused myself to ease his posture or give him to drink from the pannikin; but, for the rest, I dozed, and must have dozed for hours.

I started up wide awake at the sound of a footstep beside me, and sat erect, blinking against the rays of a lantern held close to my eyes. The Princess held it, and at Nat's head and feet stood Marc'antonio and Stephanu, in the act of lifting his litter. She motioned that I should stand up and follow. Marc'antonio and Stephanu fell into file behind us. Each carried a gun in a sling.

"I will hold the light where the path is bad," she said quietly; "but step carefully and keep a watch upon your feet. In an hour's time we shall have plenty of light."

I looked and saw the sickle of the waning moon suspended over the gulf. It shot but the feeblest glimmer along the edges of the granite pinnacles, none upon the black masses of the pine-tops. But around it the darkness held a faint violet glow, and I knew that day must be climbing close on its heels.

There was no promise of day, however, along the track into which we plunged—the track by which my comrades had descended to cross the valley. It dived down the mountain side through a tunnel of pines, and in places the winter streams, now dry, had channelled it and broken it up with land-slides.

"You do not ask where I am leading you," she said, holding her lantern for me at one of these awkward places.

"I am your hostage, Princess," I answered, without looking at her, my eyes being busy just then in discovering good foothold. "You must do with me what you will."

"*If I could! Ah, if I could!*"

She said it hard and low, with clenched teeth, almost hissing the words. I stared at her, amazed. No sign of anger had she shown until this moment. What cause indeed had she to be angered? In what way had my words offended? Yet angry she was, trembling with such a gust of wrath that the lantern shook in her hand.

Before I could master my surprise, she had mastered herself: and, turning, resumed her way. For the next twenty minutes we descended in silence, while the dawn, breaking above the roofed pines, filtered down to us and filled the spaces between their trunks with a brownish haze. By and by, when the slope grew easier and flattened itself out to form the bottom of the basin, these pines gave place to a chestnut wood and the carpet of slippery needles to a tangled undergrowth taller than a very tall man: and here, in a clearing beside the track, we came on a small hut with a ruinous palisade beside it, fencing off a pen or courtyard of good size—some forty feet square, maybe.

The Princess halted, and I halted a few paces from

her, studying the hut. It was built of pine-logs sawn lengthwise in half and set together with their untrimmed bark turned outwards: but the most of their bark had peeled away with age. It had two square holes for windows, and a doorway, but no door. Its shingle roof had buckled this way and that with the rains, and had taken on a tinge of grey which the dawn touched to softest silver. Lines of more brilliant silver criss-crossed it, and these were the tracks of snails.

"O King of Corsica," she turned to me, "behold your palace!"

Her eyes were watching me, but in what expectation I could not tell. I stepped carelessly to the doorway and took a glance around the interior.

"It might be worse; and I thank you, Princess."

"Ajo, Marc'antonio! Since the stranger approves of it so far, go carry his friend within."

"Your pardon, Princess," I interposed; "the place is something too dirty to house a sick man, and until it be cleaned my friend will do better in the fresh air."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Your subjects, O King, have left it in this mess, and they will help you very little to improve it."

I walked over to the palisade and looked across it upon an unsightly area foul with dried dung and the

trampling of pigs. For weeks, if not months, it must have lain uninhabited, but it smelt potently even yet.

"My subjects, Princess?"

"With Giusè lying sick, the hogs roam without a keeper: and my people have chosen you in his room." She paused, and I felt, rather than saw, that both the men were eyeing me intently. I guessed then that she was putting on me a meditated insult; to the Corsican mind, doubtless, a deep one.

"So I am to keep your hogs, Princess?" said I with a deliberate air. "Well, I am your hostage."

"I am breaking no faith, Englishman."

"As to that, please observe that I am not accusing you. I but note that, having the power, you use it. But two things puzzle me: of which the first is, where shall I find my charge?"

"Marc'antonio shall fetch them down to you from the other side of the mountain."

"And next, how shall I learn to tend them?" I asked, still keeping my matter-of-fact tone.

"They will give you no trouble. You have but to pen them at night and number them, and again at daybreak turn them loose. They know this forest and prefer it to the other side: you will not find that they wander. At night you have only to blow a horn which Marc'antonio will bring you, and the sound of it will fetch them home."

"A light job," said Stephanu with a grin, "when a man can bring his stomach to it."

"Not so light as you suppose, my friend," I answered. "The sty, here, will need some cleansing. Since if these are to be my subjects, I must do my best for them. It may not amount to much, but at least my hogs shall keep themselves cleaner than some Corsicans, even than some Corsican cooks."

"Stephanu," said Marc'antonio gravely, "the Englishman meant that for you: and I tell you what I have told you before, that yours are no fitly kept hands for a cook. I have travelled abroad and seen the ways of other nations."

"The sty will need mending too, Princess," said I: "but before nightfall I will try to have it ready."

"You will find tools in the hut," she answered with a glance at Marc'antonio, who nodded. "For food, you shall be kept supplied. Stephanu has brought, in his sack yonder, flesh, cheese, and wine sufficient for three days, with milk for your friend: and day by day fresh milk shall be sent down to you."

Her words were commonplace, yet her cheeks wore an angry flush beneath their sun-burn; and I knew why. Her insult had miscarried. In accepting this humiliation I had somehow mastered her: even the tone she used, level and matter-of-fact, she used perforce, in place of the high scorn with which

she had started to sentence me. My spirits rose. If I could not understand this girl, neither could she understand me. She only felt defeat, and it puzzled and angered her.

"You have no complaint to make?" she asked, hesitating in spite of herself as she turned to go.

I laughed, having discovered that my laugh perplexed her. "None whatever, Princess. Am I not your hostage?"

. . . . .

When they were gone I laughed again, with a glance at Nat, who lay with closed eyes and white, still face where Marc'antonio and Stephanu had made a couch of fern and some heather for him under the chestnut boughs. The sight of the heather gave me an idea, and I walked back to where, at the end of the chestnut wood, a noble clump of it grew, under a scarp of rock where the pines broke off. With my knife I cut an armful of it and returned to the hut, pausing on my way to gather some strings of a creeper which looked to be a clematis and sufficiently tough for my purpose. My next step was to choose and cut a tolerably straight staff of ilex, about five feet in length and close upon two inches thick. While I trimmed it a blackbird began to sing in the undergrowth behind the hut, and, listening, my ears seemed to catch in the pauses of

his song a sound of running water, less loud but nearer and more distinct than the murmur of the many rock-streams that tinkled into the valley. I dropped my work for a while and, passing to the back of the hut, found and followed through the bushes a foot-track—overgrown and tangled with briers, but still a track—which led me to the water. It ran, with a murmur almost subterranean, beneath bushes so closely overarched that my feet were on the brink before I guessed, and I came close upon taking a bath at unawares. Now this stream, so handy within reach, was just what I wanted, and among the bushes by the verge grew a plant—much like our English osier, but dwarfer—extremely pliant and tougher than the tendrils of the clematis; so that, having stripped it of half a dozen twigs, I went back to work more blithely than ever.

But for fear of disturbing Nat I could have whistled. It may even be that, intent on my task, I did unwittingly whistle a few bars of a tune: or perhaps the blackbird woke him. At any rate, after half an hour's labour I looked up from my handiwork and met his eyes, open, intent on me and with a question in them.

"What am I doing, eh? I am making a broom, lad." I held it up for him to admire.

"Where is she?" he asked feebly.

"She?" I set down my broom, fetched him a pannikinful of milk, and knelt beside him while he drank it. "If you mean the Princess Camilla, she has gone back to her mountain, leaving us in peace."

"Camilla?" he murmured the word.

"And a very suitable name, it seems to me. There was, if you remember, a young lady in the Æneid of pretty much the same disposition."

"Camilla," he repeated, and again but a little above his breath. "Your father . . . he is helping her?"

"Helping her?" I echoed. "My dear lad, if ever a young woman could take care of herself it is the Princess. . . . And as for my father helping her, she has packed him off northwards across the mountains with a flea in his ear. And, talking of fleas—" I went on with a glance at the hut.

He brought me to a full stop with a sudden grip on my arm, astonishingly strong for a wounded man. "Nay, lad—nay!" I coaxed him, but slipped a hand under him as he insisted and sat upright.

"She needs help, I tell you," he gasped. "Needs help . . . it was for help I ran when—when——"

"But what dreaming is this? My dear fellow, she makes prisoners of us, shoots you down when you try to escape, treats me worse than a dog, banishes us to this hut which—not to put too fine a

point on it—is a pigs' sty and particularly filthy at that. I don't blame her, though some little explanation might not come amiss: but if she has any need of help, you must admit that she dissembles it pretty thoroughly."

Nat would not listen. "You did not see? You did not see?—And yet you know her language and have talked with her! Whereas I—O blind!" he broke out passionately, "blind that you could not see!"

A fit of coughing seized and shook him, and as I eased him back upon his fern pillow, blood came away upon the handkerchief I held to his lips.

"Damn her!" I swore viciously. "Let her need help if she will, and let her ask me for it! She has tried her best to kill you; and, what's more, she'll succeed if you don't lie still as I order. Help? Oh yes, I'll help her—when I have helped *you*!"

He moved his head feebly, as if to shake it: but lay quiet, panting, with closed eyes: and so, the effusion of blood having ceased, I left him and fell to work like a negro slave.

By the angle of the hut there stood a pigs' trough of granite, roughly hewn and hollowed, and among the tools within I found a leaky wooden bucket which, by daubing it with mud from the brink of the stream, I contrived to make passably watertight. A score of times I must have travelled to and fro

between the hut and the stream before I had the cistern filled. Then I fell-to upon the foul walls within, slushing and brooming them. Bats dropped from the roof and flew blundering against me: I drove them forth from the window. The mud floor became a quag: I seized a spade and shovelled it clean, mud and slime and worse filth together. And still as I toiled a song kept liddening (as we say in Cornwall) through my head: a song with two refrains, whereof the first was the old nursery jingle —"Mud won't daub sieve, sieve won't hold water, water won't wet stone, stone won't edge axe, axe won't cut rod, rod won't make a gad, a gad to hang Manachar, who has eaten my raspberries every one." (So ran the rigmarole with which Mrs. Nance had beguiled my infancy.) The second refrain echoed poor Nat's cry, "She needs help, needs help, and you could not see! Blind, blind, that you could not see!"

How should she need help? Little cared I though she needed it, and sorely! But how had the notion taken hold of Nat?

Weakness? Delirium? No: he had been running to get help for her when they shot him down. I had his word for that. . . . But she had pursued with the others. For aught I knew, she herself had fired the shot.

If she needed help, why was she treating us despitefully—putting this insult upon me, for example? Why had she used those words of hate? They had been passionate words, too; spoken from the heart in an instant of surprise. Then, again, to suppose her a friend of the Genoese was impossible. But why, if not a friend of the Genoese, was she a foe of their foes? Why had she taken to the *macchia* with these men? Why were they keeping watch on the coast while careless that their watchfire showed inland for leagues? Why, if she were a patriot, had the sight of King Theodore's crown awakened such scorn and yet rage against me, its bearer? Why again, at the mere word that my father sought the Queen Emilia, had she let him pass on, while redoubling her despite against me?

On top of these puzzles Nat must needs propound another, that this girl stood in need of help!

Help? From whom?

As my mind ran over these questions, still at every pause the old rigmarole kept dinning—"Mud won't daub sieve, sieve won't hold water, water won't wet stone . . ." on and on without ceasing, and still I toiled and sweated.

By noon the hut was clean, at any rate tolerably clean; but its soaked floor would certainly take many hours in drying, and Nat must spend another night

under the open sky. I left the hut, snatched a meal of bread and cheese, and, after a pull at the wine-flask, turned my attention to the sty. To cleanse it before nightfall was out of the question. I examined it and saw three good days' labour ahead of me. But the palisading could be repaired and made secure after a fashion, and I started upon it at once, sharpening the rotten posts with my axe, driving, fixing, nailing, binding them firmly with osier-twists, of which I had fetched a fresh supply from the stream-side. I had rolled my jacket into a pillow for Nat, that he might lie easily and watch me.

The sun was sinking beyond the mountain, staining with deep rose the pinnacles of granite that soared eastward above the pines, when a horn sounded on the slope and Marc'antonio came down the track driving the hogs before him. He instructed me good-naturedly enough in the art of penning the brutes, breaking off from time to time to compliment me on my labours, the sum of which appeared to affect him with a degree of wonder not far short of awe.

"But why are you doing it? *Perchè? perchè?*" he broke off once or twice to ask, eyeing me askance with a look rather fearful than unfriendly.

"The Princess laid this task upon me," I answered cheerfully, indeed with elation, feeling that so long

as I could keep my tyrants puzzled I still kept, somehow, the upper hand.

"I have travelled, in my time," said Marc'antonio with a touch of vainglorious pride. "I have made the acquaintance of many continentals, even with some that were extremely rich. But I never crossed over to England."

"You would have found it full of eccentrics," said I.

"I dare say," said he. "For myself, I said to myself when I took ship, 'Marc'antonio,' said I, 'you must make it a rule to be surprised at nothing.' But do Englishmen clean hogs' styes for pleasure?"

"And the Princess? She has also travelled?" I asked, meeting his question with another.

For the moment my question appeared to disturb him. Recovering himself, he answered gravely, "She has travelled, but not very far. You must not do her an injustice. . . . We form our opinions on what we see."

"It is admittedly the best way," I assented with equal gravity.

At the shut of night he left me and went his way up the mountain path, and an hour later, having attended to Nat's wants, tired as in all my life I had never been, I stretched myself on the turf and slept under the stars.

The grunting of the hogs awakened me a little before dawn. I went to the pen, and as soon as I opened the hatch they rushed out in a crowd, all but upsetting me as they jostled against my legs. Then, after listening for a while after they had vanished into the undergrowth and darkness, I crept back to my couch and slept.

That day, though the sun was rising before I awoke again and broke fast, I caught up with it before noon: that is to say, with the work I had promised myself to accomplish. Before sunset I had scraped over and cleaned the entire area of the sty. Also I had fetched fern in handfuls and strewn the floor of the hut, which was now dry and clean to the smell.

In the evening I blew my horn for the hogs, and they returned to their pen obediently as the Princess had promised. I had scarcely finished numbering them when Marc'antonio came down the track, this time haling a recalcitrant she-goat by a halter.

He tethered the goat and instructed me how to milk her.

The next evening he brought, at my request, a saw. I had cleaned out the sty thoroughly, and turned-to at once to enlarge the window-openings to admit more light and air into the hut.

Still, as I worked, my spirits rose. Nat was bet-

tering fast. In a few more days, I promised myself, he would be out of danger. To be sure he shook his head when I spoke of this hope, and in the intervals of sleep—of sleep in which I rejoiced as the sweet restorer—lay watching me, with a trouble in his eyes.

He no longer disobeyed my orders, but lay still and watched. My last rag of shirt was gone now, torn up for bandages. Marc'antonio had promised to bring fresh linen to-morrow. By night I slept with my jacket about me. By day I worked naked to the waist, yet always with a growing cheerfulness.

It was on the fourth afternoon, and while yet the sun stood a good way above the pines, that the Princess Camilla deigned to revisit us. I had carried Nat forth into the glade before the hut, where the sun might fall on him temperately, after a torrid day—torrid, that is to say, on the heights, but in our hollow, pight about with the trees, the air had clung heavily.

Marc'antonio, an hour earlier than usual, came down the track with a bundle of linen under his left arm. I did not see that any one followed him until Nat pulled himself up, clutching at my elbow.

"Princess! Princess!" he cried, and his voice rang shrill towards her under the boughs. "Help her . . . I cannot——"

His voice choked on that last word as she came forward and stood regarding him carelessly, coldly, while I wiped the blood and then the bloody froth from his lips.

"Your friend looks to be in an ill case," she said.

"You have killed him," said I, and looked up at her stonily as Nat's head fell back, with a weight I could not mistake, on my arms.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST CHALLENGE

The remedye agayns Ire is a vertu that men clepen Mansuetude, that is Debonairetee; and eek another vertu, that men callen Pacience or Suffrance. . . . This vertu disconfiteth thyn enemy. And therefore seith the wyse man, "If thou wolt venquisse thyn enemy, lerne to suffre."—CHAUCER, *Parson's Tale.*

"You have killed him." I lowered Nat's head, stood up and accused her fiercely.

She confronted me, contemptuous yet pale. Even in my wrath I could see that her pallor had nothing to do with fear.

"Say that I have, what then?" She very deliberately unhitched the gun from her bandolier, and, after examining the lock, laid it on the turf midway between us. "As my hostage you may claim vendetta; take your shot then, and afterwards Marc'antonio shall take his."

"No, no, Englishman!" Marc'antonio ran between us while yet I stared at her without comprehending, and there was anguish in his cry. "The Princess lies to you. It was I that fired the shot—I that killed your friend!"

The girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently. "Ah, well then, Marc'antonio, since you will have it so, give me my gun again and hand yours to the cavalier. Do as I tell you, please," she commanded, as the man turned to her with a dropping jaw.

"Princess, I implore you——"

"You are a coward, Marc'antonio."

"Have it so," he answered sullenly. "It is God's truth, at all events, that I am afraid."

"For me? But I have this." She tapped the barrel of her gun as she took it from him. "And afterwards—if that is in your mind—afterwards I shall still have Stephanu."

She said it lightly, but it brought all the blood back to his brow and cheek with a rush. Not for many days did I learn the full meaning of the look he turned on her, but for dumb reproach I never saw the like of it on man's face.

Her foot tapped the ground. "Give him the gun," she commanded, and Marc'antonio thrust it into my hands. "Now turn your back and walk to that first tree yonder, very slowly, pace by pace, as you hear me count."

Her face was set like a flint, her tone relentless. Marc'antonio half raised his two fists, clenching them for a moment, but dropped them by his side, turned

his back, and began to walk obediently towards the tree.

"One—two—three—four—five," she counted, and paused. "Englishman, this fellow has killed your friend, and you claim yourself worthy to be King of Corsica. Prove it."

"Excuse me, Princess," said I, "but before that I have some other things to prove, of which some are easy and others may be hard and tedious."

"Seven—eight—nine." With no answer, but a curl of the lip, she resumed her counting.

"Marc'antonio!" I called—he had almost reached the tree—"Come here!"

He faced about, his eyes starting, his cheeks blanched. As he drew nearer I saw that his forehead shone with sweat.

"I have a word for you," I said slowly. "In the first place, an Englishman does not shoot his game sitting; it is against the rules. Secondly, he is by no means necessarily a fool, but, if it came to shooting against two, he might have sense enough to get his first shot upon the one who held the musket—a point which your mistress overlooked perhaps." I bowed to her gravely. "And thirdly," I went on, hardening my voice, "I have to tell you, Ser Marc'antonio, that this friend of mine, whom you have killed, was not trying to

escape you, but running to seek help for the Princess."

Marc'antonio checked an exclamation. He glanced at the girl, and she at him suspiciously, with a deepening frown.

"Help?" she echoed, turning the frown upon me. "What help, sir, should I need?"

It was my turn now to shrug the shoulders. "Nay," I answered, "I tell you but what he told me. He divined, or at least he was persuaded, that you stood in need of help."

She threw a puzzled, questioning look at the poor corpse, but lifted her eyes to find mine fixed upon them, and shrank a little as I stepped close. Her two hands went behind her, swiftly. I may have made a motion to grip her by the wrists; I cannot tell. My next words surprised myself, and the tone of my voice speaking and the passion in it.

"You have killed my friend," said I, "who desired only your good. You have chosen to humiliate me, who willed you no harm. And now you say 'it shall be vendetta.' Very well, it shall be vendetta, but as *I* choose it. Keep your foolish weapons; I can do without them. Heap what insults you will upon me; I am a man and will bear them. But you are a woman, and therefore to be mastered. For my friend's sake I choose to hate you and to be

patient. For my friend's sake, who discovered your need, I too will discover it and help it; and again, not as you will, but as I determine. For my friend's sake, mistress, and if I choose, I will even love you and you shall come to my hand. Bethink you now what pains you can put on me; but at the last you shall come and place your neck under my foot, humbly, not choosing to be loved or hated, only beseeching your master!"

I broke off, half in wonder at my own words and the flame in my blood, half in dismay to see her, who at first had fronted me bravely, wince and put up both hands to her face, yet not so as to cover a tide of shame flushing her from throat to brow.

"Give me leave to shoot him, Princess," said Marc'antonio. But she shook her head. "He has been talking with some one. . . . With Stephanu?" His gaze questioned me gloomily. "No, I will do the dog justice; Stephanu would not talk."

"Lead her away," said I, "and leave me now to mourn my friend."

He touched her by the arm, at the same time promising me with a look that he would return for an explanation. The Princess shivered, but, as he stood aside to let her pass, recollected herself and went before him up the path beneath the pines.

I stepped to where Nat lay and bent over him. I

had never till now been alone with death, and it should have found me terribly alone. . . . I closed his eyes. . . . And this had been my friend, my schoolfellow, cleverer than I and infinitely more thoughtful, lacking no grace but good fortune, and lacking that only by strength of a spirit too gallant for its fate. In all our friendship it was I that had taken, he that had given; in the strange path we had entered and travelled thus far together, it was he that had supplied the courage, the loyalty, the blithe confidence that life held a prize to be won with noble weapons; he who had set his face towards the heights and pinned his faith to the stars; he, the victim of a senseless bullet; he, stretched here as he had fallen, all thoughts, all activities quenched, gone out into that night of which the darkness gathering in this forsaken glade was but a phantom, to be chased away by to-morrow's sun. To-morrow . . . to-morrow I should go on living and begin forgetting him. To-morrow? God forgive me for an ingrate, I had begun already. . . . Even as I bent over him, my uppermost thought had not been of my friend. I had made, in the moment almost of his death and across his body, my first acquaintance with passion. My blood tingled yet with the strange fire; my mind ran in a tumult of high resolves of which I understood neither the end nor the present

meaning, but only that the world had on a sudden become my battlefield, that the fight was mine, and at all cost the victory must be mine. It was, if I may say it without blasphemy, as if my friend's blood had baptised me into his faith; and I saw life and death with new eyes.

Yet, for the moment, in finding passion I had also found self; and shame of this self dragged down my elation. I had sprung to my feet in wild rage against Nat's murder; I had spoken words—fierce, unpremeditated words—which, beginning in a boyish defiance, had ended on a note which, though my own lips uttered it, I heard as from a trumpet sounding close and yet calling afar. In a minute or so it had happened, and behold! I that, sitting beside Nat, should have been terribly alone, was not alone, for my new-found self sat between us, intruding on my sorrow.

I declare now with shame, as it abased me then, that for hours, while the darkness fell and the stars began their march over the tree-tops, the ghostly intruder kept watch with me as a bodily presence mocking us both, benumbing my efforts to sorrow. . . . Nor did it fade until calm came to me, recalled by the murmur of unseen waters. Listening to them, I let my thoughts travel up to the ridges and forth into that unconfined world of which Nat's spirit

had been made free. . . . I went to the hut for a pail, groped my way to the stream, and fetched water to prepare his body for burial. When I returned the hateful presence had vanished. My eyes went up to a star—love's planet—poised over the dark boughs. Thither and beyond it Nat had travelled. Through those windows he would henceforth look back and down on me; never again through the eyes I had loved as a friend and lived to close. I could weep now, and I wept; not passionately, not selfishly, but in grief that seemed to rise about me like a tide and bear me and all fate of man together upon its deep, strong flood. . . .

At daybreak Marc'antonio and Stephanu came down the pass and found me digging the grave. I thought at first that they intended me some harm, for their faces were ill-humoured enough in all conscience; but they carried each a spade, and, after growling a salutation, set down their guns and struck in to help me with my work.

We had been digging, maybe, for twenty minutes, and in silence, when my ear caught the sound of furious grunting from the sty, where I had penned the hogs overnight, a little before sundown. Nat had watched me as I numbered them, and it seemed now so long ago that I glanced up with a start almost guilty, as though in my grief I had neglected

the poor brutes for days. In fact I had kept them in prison for a short hour beyond their usual time, and some one even now was liberating them.

It was the Princess, of whose presence I had not been aware. She stood by the gate of the pen, her head and shoulders in sunlight, while the hogs raced in shadow past her feet.

Marc'antonio glanced at her across his shoulder and growled angrily.

"Your pardon, Princess," said I slowly, as she closed the gate after the last of the hogs and came forward. "I have been remiss, but I need no help either for this or for any of my work."

She halted a few paces from the grave. "You would rather be alone?" she asked simply.

"I wish you to understand," said I, "that for the present I have no choice at all but your will."

She frowned. "I thought to lighten your work, cavalier."

I was about to thank her ironically when the sound of a horn broke the silence about us, its notes falling through the clear morning air from the heights across the valley. The Corsicans dropped their spades.

"Ajo, listen! listen!" cried Marc'antonio excitedly. "That will be the Prince—listen again! Yes, and they are answering from the mountain. It

can be no other than the Prince, returning this way!"

While we stood listening, with our faces upturned to the granite crags, I caught the Princess regarding me doubtfully. Her gaze passed on as if to interrogate Marc'antonio and Stephanu, who, however, paid no heed, being preoccupied.

Again the horn sounded; not clear as before, although close at hand, for the thick woods muffled it. For another three minutes we waited—the Princess silent, standing a little apart, with thoughtful brow, the two men conversing in rapid guttural undertones; then far up the track beneath the boughs a musket-barrel glinted, and another and another, glint following glint, as a file of men came swinging down between the pines, disappeared for a moment, and, rounding a thicket of the undergrowth, emerged upon the level clearing. In dress and bearing they were not to be distinguished from Marc'antonio, Stephanu, or any of the bandits on the mountain. Each man carried a musket and each wore the jacket and breeches of sad-coloured velvet, the small cap and leathern leggings which I afterwards learnt to be the uniform of patriotic Corsica. But as they deployed upon the glade—some forty men in all—and halted at sight of us, my eyes fell upon a priest, who in order of marching had been

midmost, or nearly midmost, of the file, and upon a young man beside him, towards whom the Princess sprang with a light step and a cry of salutation.

"The blessing of God be upon you, O brother!"

"And upon you, O sister!" He took her kiss and returned it, yet (as I thought) with less fervour. Across her shoulder his gaze fell on me, with a kind of peevish wonder, and he drew back a little as if in the act to question her. But she was beforehand with him for the moment.

"And how hast thou fared, O Camillo?" she asked, leaning back, with a hand upon his either shoulder, to look into his eyes.

He disengaged himself sullenly, avoiding her gaze. There could be no doubt that the two faces thus confronting one another belonged to brother and sister, yet of the two his was the more effeminate, and its very beauty (he was an excessively handsome lad, albeit diminutively built) seemed to oppose itself to hers and caricature it, being so like yet so infinitely less noble.

"We have fared ill," he answered, turning his head aside, and added with sudden petulance, "God's curse upon Pasquale Paoli, and all his house!"

"He would not receive you?"

"On the contrary, he made us welcome and lis-

tened to all we had to say. When I had done, Father Domenico took up the tale."

"But surely, brother, when you had given him the proofs—when he heard all——"

"The mischief, sister," he interrupted, stabbing at the ground with his heel and stealing a sidelong glance at the priest, "the mischief was, he had already heard too much."

She drew back, white in the face. She, too, flung a look at the priest, but a more honest one, although in flinging it she shrank away from him. The priest, a sensual, loose-lipped man, whose mere aspect invited one to kick him, smiled sideways and downwards with a deprecating air, and spread out his hands as who should say that here was no place for a domestic discussion.

I could make no guess at what the youth had meant; but the girl's face told me that the stroke was cruel, and (as often happens with the weak) his own cruelty worked him into a passion.

"But who is this man with you?" he demanded, the blood rushing to his face. "And how came you alone with him, and Stephanu, and Marc'antonio? You don't tell me that the others have deserted!"

"No one has deserted, brother. You will find them all upon the mountain."

"And the recruits? Is this a recruit?"

"There are no recruits."

"No recruits? By God, sister, this is too bad! Has this cursed rumour spread, then, all over the countryside that honest men avoid us like a plague —us, the Colonne!" He checked his tongue as she drew herself up and turned from him, before the staring soldiery, with drawn mouth and stony eyes; but stepped a pace after her on a fresh tack of rage.

"But you have not answered me. Who is this man, I repeat? And eh?—but what in God's name have we here?" He halted, staring at the half-digged grave and Nat's body laid beside it.

Marc'antonio stepped forward. "These are two prisoners, O Prince, of whom, as you see, we are burying one."

"Prisoners? But whence?"

"From England, as they tell us, O Prince."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TENDER MERCIES OF PRINCE CAMILLO

Tyranny is the wish to have in one way what can only be had in another.—*Blaise Pascal.*

The young man eyed me insolently for a moment and turned again to his sister.

"Camilla! will you have the goodness to explain?" he demanded.

But here, while she hesitated, searching her brother's face proudly yet pitifully, as though unable quite to believe in the continued brutality of his tone, I struck in.

"Pardon me, Signore," said I, "but an explanation from me may be shorter."

"Eh? So you are English, and speak Corsican?"

"Or such Tuscan," answered I modestly, "as may pass for a poor attempt at it. Yes, I am English and have come hither—as the Princess, your sister, will tell you—on a political errand which you may or may not consider important."

The Princess, who had turned and stood facing

her brother again, threw me a quick look. "I know nothing of that," she said hurriedly, "save that he came with five others in a ship from England and encamped at Paomia below; that, being taken prisoners, they professed to be seeking the Queen Emilia, to deliver her; and that thereupon of the six I let four go, keeping this one as hostage, with his friend, who has since died."

"And the crown," put in Stephanu. "The Princess has forgotten to mention the crown."

"What crown?"

"The crown, sir," said I boldly, seeing the Princess hesitate, "of the late King Theodore of Corsica, given by him into my keeping."

I saw the priest start as if flicked with a whip, and shoot me a glance of curiosity from under his loose upper lids. His pupil stepped up and thrust his face close to mine.

"Eh? So you were seeking *me*?" he demanded.

"You are mistaken, sir," said I, "whatever your reason for such a guess. My companions—one of them my father, an Englishman and by name Sir John Constantine—are seeking the Queen Emilia, whom they understand to be held prisoner by the Genoese. Meanwhile your sister detains me as hostage, and the crown in pawn."

I had kept an eye on the priest as I pronounced

my father's name: and again (or I was mistaken) the pendulous lids flickered slightly.

"You do not answer my main question," the young man persisted. "What are you doing, here in Corsica, with the crown of King Theodore?"

"I am the less likely to answer that question, sir, since you can have no right to ask it."

"'No right to ask it?'" he echoed, stepping back with a slow laugh. "No right to ask it—I! King Theodore's son!"

I shrugged my shoulders. I had a mind to laugh back at his impudence, and indeed nothing but the mercy of Heaven restrained me and so saved my life. As it was, I heard an ominous growl and glanced around to find the whole company of bandits regarding me with lively disfavour, whereas up to this point I had seemed to detect in their eyes some hints of leniency, even of goodwill. By their looks they had disapproved of their master's abuseful words to his sister, albeit with some reserve which I set down to their training. But even more evidently they believed to a man in this claim of his.

My gesture, slight as it was, gave his anger its opportunity. He drew back a pace, his handsome mouth curving into a snarl.

"You doubt my word, Englishman?"

"I have no evidence, sir, for doubting King

Theodore's," I answered as carelessly as I could, hoping the while that none of them heard the beating of my heart, loud in my own ears as the throb-throb of a pump. "If you be indeed King Theodore's son, then your father——"

"Say on, sir."

"—Why, then, your father, sir, practised some economy in telling me the truth. But my father and I will be content with the Queen Emilia's simple word."

As I began this answer I saw the Princess turn away, dropping her hands. At its conclusion she turned again, but yet irresolutely.

"We will find something less than the Queen Emilia's word to content you, my friend," her brother promised, eyeing me and breathing hard. "Where is the crown, Stephanu?"

"In safe-keeping, O Prince. I beg leave to say, too, that it was I who found it in the Englishman's camp and brought it to the Princess."

"You shall have your reward, my good Stephanu. You shall put the bearer, too, into safe-keeping. Stand back, take your gun, and shoot me this dog, here beside his grave."

The Princess stepped forward. "Stephanu," she said quietly, "you will put down that gun."

Her brother rounded on her with a curse. For

the moment she did not heed, but kept her eyes on Stephanu, who had stepped back with musket half-lifted and finger already moving towards the trigger-guard.

"Stephanu," she repeated, "on my faith as a Corsican, if you raise that gun an inch—even a little inch—higher, I never speak to you again." Then lifting a hand, she swung round upon her brother, whose rage (I thank Heaven) for the moment choked him. "Is it meet, think you, O brother, for a King of Corsica to kill his hostage?"

"Is it meet, O sister," he snarled, "for you, of all women, to champion a man—and a foreigner—before my soldiers? Shoot him, Stephanu!"

Her head went up proudly. "Stephanu will not shoot. And you, my brother, that are so careful—I sometimes think so overcareful—of my honour, for once bethink you that your own deserves attention. This Englishman placed himself in my hands freely as a hostage. From the first, since you force me to say it, I had no liking for him. Afterwards, when I knew his errand, I hated him for your sake: I hated him so that in my rage I strained all duty towards a hostage that I might insult him. Marc'antonio will bear me witness."

"The Princess is speaking the truth before God," said Marc'antonio gravely. "She made the man a

keeper of swine yonder." He waved a hand towards the sty. "And he is, as I understand, a cavalier in his own country."

"I did more than that," the Princess went on. "Having strained the compact, I tempted him to break it—to shoot me or to shoot Marc'antonio, so that one or other of us might be free to kill him."

She paused, again with her eyes on Marc'antonio, who nodded. "And that also is the truth," he said. "She put a gun into his hands, that he might kill me for having killed his friend. I did not understand at the time."

"A pretty coward!" The young man flung this taunt out at me viciously; but I had enough to do to hold myself steady, there by the grave's edge, and did not heed him.

"I do not think he is a coward," said she. (O, but those words were sweet! and for the first time I blessed her.) "But coward or no coward, he is our hostage and you must not kill him."

He turned to the priest, who all this while had stood with head on one side, eyes aslant, and the air and attitude of a stranger who, having stumbled on a family squabble, politely awaits its termination. (This, I may say, was the attitude I half-unconsciously tried to copy, but with the difference that I kept my eyes on the blue sky above the tree-tops.)

"Father Domenico, is my sister right? And may I not kill this man?"

"She is right," answered the reverend father with something like a sigh. "You cannot kill him consistently with honour, though I admit the provocation to be great. The Princess appears to have committed herself to something like a pledge." He paused here, and with his tongue moistened his loose lips. "Moreover," he continued, "to kill him, on our present information, would be inadvisable. I know—at least I have heard—something of this Sir John Constantine whom the young man asserts to be his father; and, by what has reached me, he is capable of much."

"Do you mean," asked the Prince, bridling angrily, "that I am to fear him?"

"Not at all," the priest answered quickly, still with his eyes aslant. "But, from what I have heard, he was fortunate, long ago, to earn the esteem of the good lady your mother, and"—he paused and felt for his snuff-box—"it would appear that the trick runs in the family."

"By God, then, if I may not kill him, I may at least improve on my sister's treatment," swore the young man. "Made him her swine-keeper, did she? I will promote him a step. Here, you! Take and truss him by the heels!—and fetch me a chain, one of you, from the forage-shed. . . ."

In the short time it took him to devise my punishment the Prince displayed a devilishly ingenious turn of mind. Within ten minutes under his careful directions they had me down flat on my back in the filth of the sty, with my neck securely chained to a post of the palisade, my legs outstretched, and either ankle strapped to a peg. My hands they left free, to supply me (as the Prince explained) with food and drink: that is to say, to reach for the loaf and the pannikin of water which Marc'antonio, under orders, fetched from the hut and laid beside me. Marc'antonio's punishment (for bearing witness to the truth) was to be my gaoler and sty-keeper in my room. He was promised, moreover, the job of hanging me as soon as my comrades returned.

In this pleasant posture they left me, whether under surveillance or not I could not tell, being unable to turn my head and scarce able even to move it an inch either way.

So I lay and stared up at the sky, until the blazing sun outstared me. I will dwell on none of my torments but this, which towards midday became intolerable. Certainly I had either died or gone mad under it, but that my hands were free to shield me; and these I turned in the blistering glare as a cook turns a steak on the gridiron. Now and again I dabbled them in the pannikin beside me, very carefully, eking out the short supply of water.

I had neither resisted nor protested. I hugged this thought and meant, if die I must, to die hugging it. I had challenged the girl, promising her to be patient. To be sure protest or resistance would have been idle. But I had kept my word. I don't doubt that from time to time a moan escaped me. . . . I could not believe that Marc'antonio was near me, watching. I heard no sound at all, no distant voice or bugle-call from the camp on the mountain. The woods were silent . . . silent as Nat, yonder, in his grave. Surely none but a fiend could sit and watch me without a word. . . .

Towards evening I broke off a crust of bread and ate it. The water I husbanded. I might need it worse by and by, if Marc'antonio delayed to come.

But what if no one should come?

I had been dozing—or maybe was wandering in slight delirium—when this question wrote itself across my dreams in letters of fire, so bright that it cleared and lit up my brain in a flash, chasing away all other terrors. . . .

Mercifully, it was soon answered. Far up the glade a horn sounded—my swine-horn, blown no doubt by Marc'antonio. The hogs were coming. . . . Well, I must use my hands to keep them at their distance.

I listened with all my ears. Yes, I caught the

sound of their grunting; it came nearer and nearer, and—was that a footstep, close at hand, behind the palisade?

Something dropped at my side—dropped in the mire with a soft thud. I stretched out my hand, felt for it, clutched it.

It was a file.

My heart gave a leap. I had found a friend, then! —but in whom? Was it Marc'antonio? No: for I heard his voice now, fifty yards away, marshalling and cursing the hogs. His footstep was near the gate. As he opened it and the hogs rushed in, I slipped the file beneath me, under my shoulder-blades.

The first of the hogs, as he ran by me, put a hoof into my pannikin and upset it; and while I struck out at him, to fend him aside, another brute gobbled up my last morsel of crust. The clatter of the pannikin brought Marc'antonio to my side. For a while he stood there looking down on me in the dusk; then walked off through the sty to the hut and returned with two hurdles which he rested over me, one against another, tentwise, driving their stakes an inch or two into the soil. Slight as the fence was, it would protect me from the hogs and I thanked him. He growled ungraciously, and, picking up the pannikin, slouched off upon

a second errand. Again when he brought it replenished, and a fresh loaf of bread with it, I thanked him, and again his only answer was a growl.

I heard him latch the gate and walk away towards the hut. Night was falling on the valley. Through my roof of hurdles a star or two shone down palely. Now was my time. I slipped a hand beneath me and recovered my file—my blessed file.

The chain about my neck was not very stout. I had felt its links with my fingers a good score of times in efforts, some deliberate, others frantic, to loosen it even by a little. Loosen it I could not: the Prince had done his work too cleverly: but by my calculation an hour would suffice me to file it through.

But an hour passed, and two hours, and still I lay staring up at the stars, listening to the hogs as they rubbed flanks and chose and fought for their lairs: still I lay staring, with teeth clenched and the file idle in my hand.

I had challenged, and I had sworn. "Bethink you now what pains you can put upon me. . . ." These tortures were not of her devising; but I would hold her to them. I was her hostage, and, though it killed me, I would hold her to the last inch of her bond. As a Catholic, she must believe in hell. I

would carry my wrong even to hell then, and meet her there with it and master her.

I was mad. After hours of such a crucifixion a man must needs be mad. . . . "Prosper, lad, your ideas are nought and your ambitions earth: but you have a streak of damned obstinacy which makes me not altogether hopeless of you!" These had been Nat's words, a month ago; and Nat lay in his grave yonder. . . . The cramp in my legs, the fiery pain ringing my neck, met and ran over me in waves of total anguish. At the point where my will failed me to hold out, the power failed me (I thank Heaven) to lift a hand. Yet the will struggled feebly; struggled on to the verge over which all sensation dropped plumb, as into a pit.

. . . . .

I unclosed my eyes upon the grey dawn; but upon what dawn I knew not, whether of earth or purgatory or hell itself. They saw it swimming in a vague light: but my ears, from a sound as of rushing waters, awoke to a silence on which a small footfall broke, a few yards away. Marc'antonio must have unpenned the hogs; for the sty was empty. And the hogs in their rush must have thrown down the hurdles protecting me; for these lay collapsed, the one at my side, the other across me.

The light footfall drew close and halted. I looked up into the face of the Princess.

She came, picking her way across the mire; and with caution, as if she feared to be overheard. Clearly she had expected to find the sty empty, for even to my dazed senses her dismay was evident as she caught sight of me beneath the hurdle.

"You have not gone! Oh, why have you not gone?"

She was on her knees beside me in the filth. I heard her calling to Marc'antonio, and presently Marc'antonio came, obedient as ever, yet protesting.

"He has not gone!" She moved her hands with a wringing gesture.

I tried to speak, but for answer could only spread my hand, which still grasped the file: and for days after it kept a blue weal bitten across the palm.

I heard Marc'antonio's voice protesting as she took the file and sawed with it frantically across my neck-chain.

"But he must escape and hide, at least."

"He cannot, Princess. The torture has worn him out."

"It were better he died, then. For I must go."

"It were better he died, Princess: but his youth is tough. And that you must go is above all things necessary. The Prince would kill me. . . ."

"A little while, Marc'antonio! The file is working."

"To what end, Princess?—since time is wanting. The bugle will call—it may call now at any moment. And if the Prince should miss you— Indeed it were better that he died——"

Their voices swam on my ear through giddy whirls of mist. I heard him persuade her to go—at the last insist upon her going. Still the file worked.

Suddenly it ceased working. It seemed to me that they both had withdrawn, and my neck still remained in bondage, though my legs were free. I knew that my legs were free, though I had not the power to test this by drawing them up. I tried once, and closed my eyes, swooning with pain.

Upon the swoon broke a shattering blow, across my legs and below the knees; a blow that lifted my body to clutch with both hands upon night and fall back in agony upon black unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW MARC'ANTONIO NURSED ME AND GAVE ME COUNSEL

Yet sometimes famous Princes like thyself,
Drawn by report, adventurous by desire,
Tell thee, with speechless tongues and semblance pale,
That without covering, save yon field of stars,
They here stand martyrs, slain in Cupid's wars;
And with dead cheeks advise thee to desist
For going on Death's net, whom none resist.

—*Pericles, Prince of Tyre.*

His honour forbidding him to kill me, the Prince Camillo had given orders to break my legs: and since to abandon me in this plight went against the conscience of his followers (and even, it is possible, against his own), he had left Marc'antonio behind to nurse me—thus gratifying a second spite. The Prince was an ingenious young man.

So much I gathered in faint intervals between anguish while Marc'antonio bound me with rude splints of his own manufacture. Yet he said little and did his surgery, though not ungently, with a taciturn frown which I set down to moroseness, having learnt somehow that the bandits had broken up their camp

on the mountain and marched off, leaving us two alone.

"Did the Princess know of this?" I managed to ask, and I believe this was my first intelligible question.

Marc'antonio paused before answering. "She knew that you were to be hurt, but not the manner of it. It was she that brought you the file, by stealth. Why did you not use it, and escape?"

"She brought me the file?" I knew it already, but found a fierce satisfaction in the words. "And she—and you—tried to use it upon my chain here and deliver me: I forced you to that, my friends! As for using it myself, you heard what I promised her, yesterday, before her brother came."

"I heard you talk very foolishly; and now you have done worse than foolishly. I do not understand you at all—no, by the Mother of God, I do not! You had the whole night for filing at your chain: and it would have been better for you, and in the end for her."

"And for you also, Marc'antonio," I added.

He was silent.

"And for you also, Marc'antonio?" I repeated it as a question.

"Your escape would have been put down to me,

Englishman. I had provided for that," he answered simply.

"Forgive me," I muttered, thrown back upon sudden contrition. "I was thinking only that you must feel it a punishment to be left alone with me. I had forgot——"

"It is hard," he interrupted, "to bear everything in mind when one is young." His tone was quiet, decisive, as of one stating a fact of common knowledge: but the reproof cut me like a knife.

"The Princess has gone too?" I asked.

"She has gone. They are all gone. That is why it would have been better for her too that you had escaped."

I pondered this for a minute. "You mean," said I, "that—always supposing the Prince had not killed you in his rage—you would now be at her side?"

He nodded.

"Still, she has Stephanu. Stephanu will do his best," I suggested.

"Against what, eh?" He put this poser to me, turning with angry eyes, but ended on a short laugh of contempt. "Do not try make-believe with me, O Englishman."

"There is one thing I know," said I doggedly, "that the Princess is in trouble or danger. And a

second thing I know, that you and Stephanu are her champions. But a third thing, which I do not know, is why you and Stephanu hate one another."

"And yet that should have been the easiest guess of the three," said he, rising abruptly and taking first a dozen paces towards the hut, then a dozen back to the shadow of the chestnut-tree against the bole of which my head rested as he had laid me, having borne me thither from the sty.

"*Campioni?* That is a good word and I thank you for it, Englishman. Yet you wonder why I hate Stephanu? Listen. Were you ever in Florence, in the Boboli gardens?"

"Never. But why?"

"Mbè! I have travelled, for my part." Marc'antonio now and always mentioned his travels with an innocent boastfulness. "Well, in the gardens there you will find a fountain, and on either side of it a statue—the statues of two old kings. They sit there, those two, carved in stone, face to face across the fountain; and with faces so full of hate that I declare it gives you a shiver down the spine—all the worse, if you will understand, because their eyes have no sight in them. Now the story goes that these two kings in life were friends of a princess of Tuscany far younger than themselves, and championed her, and established her house while she was

weak and her enemies were strong; and that afterwards in gratitude she caused these statues to be set up beside the fountain. Another story (to me it sounds like a child's tale) says that at first there was no fountain, and that the princess knew nothing of the hatred between these old men; but the sculptor knew. Having left the order with him, she married a husband of her own age and lived for years at a foreign court. At length she returned to Florence and led her husband one day out through the garden to show him the statues, when for the first time she saw what the sculptor had done and knew for the first time that these dead men had hated one another for her sake; whereupon she let fall one tear which became the source of the fountain. To me all this part of the story is foolishness: but that I and Stephanu hate one another not otherwise than those two old kings, and for no very different cause, is God's truth, cavalier."

"You are devoted to her, you two?" I asked, tempting him to continue.

He gazed down on me for a moment with immeasurable contempt. "I give you a figure, and you would put it into words! Words!" He spat. "And yet it is the truth, Englishman, that once she called me her second father. 'Her second father'— I have repeated that to Stephanu once or twice when

I have lost my temper (a rare thing with me). You should see him turn blue!"

I could get no more out of Marc'antonio that day, nor indeed did the pain I suffered allow me to continue the catechism. A little before night fell he lifted me again and carried me to a bed of clean-smelling heather and fern he had prepared within the hut; and, all the night through, the slightest moan from me found him alert to give me drink or shift me to an easier posture. Our total solitude seemed from the first to breed a certain good-fellowship between us: neither next day nor for many days did he remit or falter in his care for me. But his manner, though not ungentle, was taciturn. He seemed to carry about a weight on his mind; his brow wore a constant frown, vexed and unhappy. Once or twice I caught him talking to himself.

"To be sure it was enough to madden all the saints: and the Prince is not one of them. . . ."

"What was enough to madden all the saints, O Marc'antonio?" I asked from my bed.

Already he had turned in some confusion, surprised by the sound of his own voice. He was down on hands and knees, and had been blowing upon the embers of a wood fire, kindled under a pan of goat's milk. The goat herself browsed in the sunlight be-

yond the doorway, in the circuit allowed by a twenty-foot tether.

"What was enough to madden all the saints, O Marc'antonio?"

"Why," said he savagely, "your standing up to him and denying his birth and his sister's before all the crowd. I did not think that anything could have saved you."

"If I remember, I added that the Queen Emilia's bare word would be enough for me."

"So. But you denied it on his father's, and that is what his enemies, the Paolists all, would give their ears to hear—yes, and Pasquale Paoli himself, though he passes for a just man."

"Marc'antonio," said I seriously, "are the Prince and Princess in truth the children of King Theodore?"

"As God hears me, cavalier, they are his twin children, born in the convent of Santa Maria di Fosciandora, in the valley of the Serchio, some leagues to the north of Florence; and on the feast-day of Saint Mark these sixteen years ago."

"Then King Theodore either knew nothing of it, or he was a liar."

"He was a liar, cavalier."

"Stay a moment. I have a mind to tell you the whole story as it came to me, and as I should have

told it to the Prince Camillo, had he treated me with decent courtesy."

Marc'antonio ceased blowing the fire and, sitting back on his heels, disposed himself to listen. Very briefly I told him of my journey to London, my visit to the Fleet, and how I received the crown with Theodore's blessing. "That he denied having children I will not say: but (I remember well) my father took it for granted that he had no children, and he said nothing to the contrary. Indeed on any other assumption his gift of the crown to me would have been meaningless."

Marc'antonio nodded, following my argument.

"But there is another difficulty," I went on. "My father, who does not lie, told me once that King Theodore returned to the island in the year 'thirty-nine, where he stayed but for a week; and that not until a year later did his Queen escape across to Tuscany."

But here Marc'antonio shook his head vigorously. "Whoever told your father that, told him an untruth. The Queen fled from Porto Vecchio in that same winter of 'thirty-nine, a few days before Christmas. I myself steered the boat that carried her."

"To be sure," said I, "my father may have been told this also by King Theodore."

"The good sisters of the convent," continued

Marc'antonio, "received the Queen and did all that was necessary for her. But among them must have been one who loved the Genoese or their gold: for when the children were but ten days old they vanished, having been stolen and handed secretly to the Genoese—yes, cavalier, out of the Queen's own sleeping-chamber. Little doubt had we they were dead—for why should their enemies spare them? And never should we have recovered trace of them but for the Father Domenico, who knew what had become of them (having learnt it, no doubt, among the sisters' confessions, to receive which he visited the convent) and that they were alive and unharmed: but for his oath's sake he kept the secret, or else waiting for the time to ripen."

"Then King Theodore may also have believed them dead," I suggested. "Let us do him that justice. Or he may never have known that they existed."

Marc'antonio brushed this aside with a wave of his hand. "The cavalier," he answered with dignity, "may have heard me allude to my travels?"

"Once or twice."

"The first time that I crossed the Alps"—great Hannibal might have envied the roll in Marc'antonio's voice—"I bore the King tidings of his good fortune. It was Stephanu who followed,

a week later, with the tale that the children were stolen."

"Then Theodore *did* believe them dead."

"At the time, cavalier; at the time, no doubt. But more than twelve years later, being in Brussels—" Here Marc'antonio pulled himself up, with a sudden dark flush and a look of confusion.

"Go on, my friend. You were saying that twelve years later, happening to be in Brussels——"

"By the merest chance, cavalier. Before retiring to England King Theodore spent the most of his exile in Flanders and the Low Countries: and in Brussels, as it happened, I had word of him and learnt—but without making myself known to him —that he was seeking his two children."

"Seeking them in Brussels?"

"At a venture no doubt, cavalier. Put the case that you were seeking two children, of whom you knew only that they were alive and somewhere in Europe—like two fleas, as your might say, in a bundle of straw——"

I looked at Marc'antonio and saw that he was lying, but politely forbore to tell him so.

"Then Theodore knew that his children were alive?" said I, musing. "Yet he gave my father to understand that he had no children."

"Mbè, but he was a great liar, that Theodore!

Always when it profited, and sometimes for the pleasure of it."

"Nevertheless, to disinherit his own son!"

Marc'antonio's shoulders went up to his ears. "He knew well enough what comedy he was playing. Disinherit his own son? We Corsicans, he might be sure, would never permit that: and meanwhile your father's money bought him out of prison. Ajo, it is simple as milking the she-goat yonder!"

"If you knew my father better, Marc'antonio, you would find it not altogether so simple as you suppose. King Theodore might have told my father that these children lived, and my father would yet have bought his freedom for their sake; yes, and helped him to the last shilling and the last drop of blood to restore them to Corsica and to the Queen their mother."

"Verily, cavalier, I knew your father to be a madman," said Marc'antonio gravely after considering my words for a while. "But such madness as you speak of, who could take into account?"

"Eh, Marc'antonio? What acquaintance have you with my father that you should call him mad?"

"I remember him well, cavalier, and his long sojourning with my late master the Count Ugo at his palace of Casalabrive above the Taravo, and the

love there was between him and my young mistress that is now the Queen Emilia. Lovers they were for all eyes to see but the old Count's. Mbè! we all gossiped of it, we servants and clansmen of the Colonne—even I, that kept the goats over Bicchivano, on the road leading up to the palace, and watched them as they walked together, and was of an age to think of these things. A handsomer couple none could wish to see, and we watched them with goodwill; for the Englishman touched her hand with a kind of worship as a devout man touches his beads, and they told me that in his own country he owned great estates—greater even than the Count's. Indeed, cavalier, had your father thought less of love and more of ambition there is no saying but he might have reached out for the crown, and his love would have come to him afterwards. But, as the saying goes, while Peter stalked the mufro Paul stole the mountain: and again says the proverb, 'Bury not your treasure in another's orchard.' Along came this Theodore and with a few lies took the crown and the jewel with it. So your father went, and has come again after many years; and at the first I did not recognise him, for time has dealt heavily with us all. But afterwards, and before he spoke his name, I knew him—partly by his great stature, partly by his carriage, and partly, cavalier, by the

likeness your youth bears to his as I remember it. So you have the tale."

"And in the telling, Marc'antonio," said I, "it appears that you, who champion his children, bear Theodore's memory no goodwill."

"Theodore!" Marc'antonio spat again. "If he were alive here and before me, I would shoot him where he stood."

"For what cause?" I asked, surprised by the shake in his voice.

But Marc'antonio turned to the fire again, and would not answer.

. . . . .

As I remember, some three or four days passed before I contrived to draw him into further talk; and, curiously enough, after trying him a dozen times *per ambages* (as old Mr. Grylls would have said) and in vain, on the point of despair I succeeded with a few straight words.

"Marc'antonio," said I, "I have a notion about King Theodore."

"I am listening, cavalier."

"—A suspicion only, and horribly to his discredit."

"It is the likelier to be near the truth."

"Could he—think you—have sold his children to the Genoese?"

Marc'antonio cast a quick glance at me. "I have thought of that," he said quietly. "He was capable of it."

"It would explain why they were allowed to live. A father, however deep his treachery, would make that a part of the bargain."

Marc'antonio nodded.

"I would give something," I went on, "to know how Father Domenico came by the secret. By confession of one of the sisters, you suggest. Well, it may be so. But there might be another way—only take warning that I do not like this Father Domenico——"

"I am listening."

"Is it not possible that he himself contrived the kidnapping—always with King Theodore's consent?"

"Not possible," decided Marc'antonio after a moment's thought. "No more than you do I like the man: but consider. It was he who sent us to find and bring them back to Corsica. At this moment, when (as I will confess to you) all odds are against it, he holds to their cause; he, a comfortable priest and a loose liver, has taken to the bush and fares hardly for his zeal."

"My good friend," said I, "you reason as though a traitor must needs work always in a straight line

and never quarrel with his paymaster: whereas by the very nature of treachery these are two of the unlikeliest things in the world. Now, putting this aside, tell me if you think your Prince Camillo the better for Father Domenico's company? . . . You do not, I see."

"I will not say that," answered Marc'antonio slowly. "The Prince has good qualities. He will make a Corsican in time. But, I own to you, he has been ill brought up, and before ever he met with Father Domenico. As yet he thinks only of his own will, like a spoilt child; and of his pleasures, which are not those of a king such as he desires to be."

Said I at a guess, "—But the pleasures—eh, Marc'antonio?—such as a forward boy learns on the pavements; of Brussels for example?"

I thought for the moment he would have knifed me, so fiercely he started back and then craned forward at me, showing his white teeth. I saw that my luck with him hung on this moment.

"Tell me," I said, facing him and dragging hard on the hurry in my voice, "and remember that I owe no love to this cub. You may be loyal to him as you will, but I am the Princess's man, I! You heard me promise her. Tell me, why has she no recruits?"

He drew back yet farther, still with his teeth bared. "Am *I* not her man?" he almost hissed.

"So you tell me," I answered with a scornful laugh, brazening it out. "You are her man, and Stephanu is her man, and the Prince too, and the Father Domenico no doubt. Yes, you are all her men, you four: but why can she collect no others?" I paused a moment and, holding up a hand, checked them off contemptuously upon my fingers. "Four of you! and among you at least one traitor! Stop!" said I, as he made a motion to protest. "You four —you and Stephanu and the Prince and Fra Domenico—know something which it concerns her fame to keep hidden; you four, and no other that I wot of. You are all her men, her champions: and yet this secret leaks out and poisons all minds against the cause. Because of it, Paoli will have no dealing with you. Because of it, though you raise your standard on the mountains, no Corsicans flock to it. Pah!" I went on, my scorn confounding him, "I called you her champion, the other day! Be so good as consider that I spoke derisively. Four pretty champions she has, indeed; of whom one is a traitor, and the other three have not the spirit to track him down and kill him!"

Marc'antonio stood close by me now. To my amazement he was shaking like a man with the ague.

"Cavalier, you do not understand," he protested hoarsely: but his eyes were wistful, as though he hoped for something which yet he dared not hear.

"Eh? I do not understand? Well, now, listen to me. I am her man, too, but in a different fashion. You heard what I swore to her, that day, beside my friend's body; that whether in hate or love, and be her need what it might, I would help her. Hear me repeat it, lying here with my both legs broken, helpless as a log. Let strength return to me and I will help her yet, and in spite of all her champions."

"In hate or in love, cavalier?" Marc'antonio's voice shook with his whole body.

"That shall be my secret," answered I. (Yet well I knew what the answer was, and had known it since the moment she had bent over me in the sty, filing at my chain.) "It had better be hate—eh, Marc'antonio?—seeing that for some reason she hates all men, except you perhaps, and Stephanu, and her brother."

"We do not count, I and Stephanu. Her brother she adores. But the rest of men she hates, cavalier, and with good cause."

"Then it had better be hate?"

"Yes, yes"—and there was appeal in his voice—"it had a thousand times better be hate, could

such a miracle happen." He peered into my eyes for a moment, and shook his head. "But it is not hate, cavalier; you do not deceive me. And since it is not——"

"Well?"

"It were better for you—far better—that Giusè had died of the wound you gave him."

"Why, what on earth has Giusè to do with this matter?" I demanded. Indeed I had all but forgotten Giusè's existence.

"Only this; that had Giusè died, they would have killed you out of hand in vendetta."

"You are an amiable race, you Corsicans!"

"And you came, cavalier, meaning to reign over us! . . . Now I have taken a liking to you and will give you a warning. Be like your father, and give up all for love."

"Suppose," said I after a pause, "that for love I choose rather to dare all?"

"Signore"—he stepped back and, raising himself erect, flung out both hands passionately—"take her, if you must take her, away from Corsica! She is innocent, but here they will never understand. What she did she did for her brother, far from home, yet he . . . he has no thanks, no bowels of pity, and here at home it is killing her! There was a young man, a noble, head of the family of Rocca

Serra by Sartene—" Marc'antonio broke off, trembling.

"You must finish," said I, in a voice cold and slow as the chilled blood about my heart.

"There was no harm in her. By her brother's will they were betrothed. She hated the youth, and he—he was eager—until the day before the marriage——"

"What happened, Marc'antonio?"

"He slew himself, cavalier. Some story reached him, and he slew himself with his own gun. O cavalier, if you can help us, take her away from Corsica!"

He cast up both hands and ran from me.

CHAPTER XX

I LEARN OF LIBERTY, AND AM RESTORED TO IT

A! Fredome is a noble thing:
Fredome mayse man to haif liking.
—BARBOUR, *The Bruce.*

Non enim propter gloriam divitias aut honores pugnamus, sed propter libertatem solummodo, quam nemo bonus nisi cum vita amittit.—*Lit. Comit. et Baron. Scotiæ ad Pap.* A.D. 1320 (quoted by BOSWELL).

Libertas quæ sera tamen respexit . . . respexit tamen.
—VIRGIL.

When corn ripeth in every steade
Mury it is in feld and hyde;
Sinne hit is and shame to chyde.
Knyghtis wolleth on huntyng ride,
The deor galopith by wodis side.
He that can his tyme abyde,
At his wille him schal betyde.—ALISAUNDER.

MORE than this Marc'antonio would not tell me, though I laid many traps for more during the long weeks my bones were healing. But although he denied me his confidence in this matter, he told me much of this Corsica I had so childishly invaded, and a great deal to make me blush for my random ig-

norance; of the people, their untiring feud with Genoa, their insufferable wrongs, their succession of heroic leaders. He did not speak of their passion for liberty, as a man will not of what is holiest in his love. He had no need. It spoke for itself in the ring of his voice, in the glooms and lights of his eyes, sombre and fierce by turns, as we lay on either side of our wood fire; and I listened, till the embers died down, to the deeds of Jean Paul de Leca, of Giudice della Rocca, of Bel Messer, of Sampiero di Ornano, of the great Gaffori and other chiefs, all famous in their day, each in his turn assassinated by Genoese gold. I heard of Venaco, where the ghost of Bel Messer yet wanders, with the ghosts of his wife and seven children drowned by the Genoese in the little lake of the Seven Bowls. I heard of the twenty-one shepherds of Bastelica who marched down from their mountains, and routed eight hundred Greeks and Genoese of the garrison of Ajaccio; how at length they were intercepted and slain between the river and the marshes—all but one youth, who, stretched among his comrades and feigning death, was taken and led to execution through the streets of the town, carrying six heads, and each a kinsman's. I heard how Gaffori, besieged his own house; how the Genoese, having stolen his infant son, exposed the child in the breach to stop the firing;

and how Gaffori called to them "I was a Corsican before I was a father," and the cannonade went on, yet the child miraculously escaped unhurt. I heard of Sampiero's last fight with his murderers, in the torrent bed under the castle of Giglio; of Maria Gentili of Oletta, who died to save her brother from death. . . . And until now these had not even been names to me! I had adventured to win this kingdom as a man goes out with a gun to shoot partridges. I could not hide my shame of it.

"You have taught me much in these evenings, O Marc'antonio," said I.

"And you, cavalier, have taught me much."

"In what way, my friend?"

Marc'antonio looked across the fire with a smile, and held up a carved piece of wood he had been sharpening to a point. In shape it resembled an elephant's tusk, and it formed part of an apparatus to keep a pig from straying, two of these tusks being so fastened above the beast's neck that they caught and hampered him in the undergrowth.

"Eccu!" said Marc'antonio. "You have taught me to be a swine-keeper, for instance. There is no shame in any calling but what a man brings to it. You have taught me to endure lesser things for the sake of greater, and that is a hard lesson at my age."

From Marc'antonio I learned not only that this Corsica was a land with its own ambitions, which no stranger might share—a nation small but earnest, in which my presence was merely impertinent and laughable withal—but that the Prince Camillo's chances of becoming its king were only a trifle less derisory than my own. Marc'antonio would not admit this in so many words; but he gave me to understand that Pasquale Paoli had by this time cleared the interior of the Genoese, and was thrusting them little by little from their last grip on the extremities of the island—Calvi and some smaller strongholds in the north, Bonifacio in the south, and a few isolated forts along the littoral; that the people looked up to him and to him only; that the constitution he had invented was working and working well; that his writ ran throughout Corsica, and his laws were enforced, even those which he had aimed at vendetta and cross-vendetta; and that the militia was faithful to him, almost to a man. "Nor will I deny, cavalier," he added, "that he seems to me an honest patriot and a wise one. They say he seeks the crown, however."

"Well, and why not?" I demanded. "If he can unite Corsica and win her freedom, does he not deserve to be her king?"

Marc'antonio shook his head.

"Would your Prince Camillo make a better one?" I urged.

"It is a question of right, cavalier. I love this Paoli for trouncing the Genoese; but for denying the Prince his rights I must hate him, and especially for the grounds of his denial."

"Tell me those grounds precisely, Marc'antonio."

But he would not; and somehow I knew that they concerned the Princess. "Paoli is generous in that he leaves us in peace," he answered, evading the question; "and I must hate him all the more for this, because he spares us out of contempt."

"Yet," said I, musing, "that priest must have a card up his sleeve. Rat that he looked, I cannot fancy him sticking to a ship until she foundered."

. . . . .

Certainly we were left in peace. For any sign that reached to us there, in our cup of the hills, the whole island might have been desolate. The forest and the beasts in it, tame and wild, belonged—so Marc'antonio informed me—to the Colonne; the slopes between us and the sea to the lost great colony of Paomia. No one disturbed us. Week followed week, yet since the Prince had passed with his men no traveller came down the path which ran between our hut and Nat's grave, over which the under-

growth already was pushing its autumn shoots. Indeed, the path led no whither but to the sea and the forsaken village. Twice a week Marc'antonio would leave me for five or six hours and return with bread, and at whiles with a bag of dried figs or a basket of cheeses and olives for supplement. I learned that he purchased them in a *paese* to the southward beyond the forest, and beyond the ridge of the hills; but he made a mystery of this, and I had to be content with his word that in Corsica folk in the bush need never starve. Also, sometimes I would hear his gun, and he would bring me home five or six brace of blackbirds strung on a wand of osier; and these birds grew plumper and made the better eating as autumn painted the arbutus with scarlet berries.

To me, so long held a prisoner within the hut, this change of season came with a shock upon the never-to-be-sufficiently-blessed day when Marc'antonio, having examined and felt my bones and pronounced them healed, lifted and bore me, as you might carry a child, up the path to the old camp on the ridge. He was proud (good man) as he had a right to be. Surgeons in Corsica there might be none, as he assured me, or none capable of probing an ordinary bullet-wound. But in youth he had learnt the art of bone-setting, and practised it upon the sheep which

slipped and broke themselves in the gorge of the Taravo; and his care of me was a masterpiece, to be boasted over to his dying day. "The smallest limp, at the outside!" he promised me; he would not answer entirely for the left leg, that thrice-teasing, thrice-accursed fracture. Another ten days, and we might be sure; he could not allow me to set foot to ground under ten days. But while he carried me he whistled a lively air, and broke off to promise me good shooting before a month was out—shooting of blackbirds, of deer perhaps, perhaps even of a *mufro*. Here the whistling grew *largo espressivo*.

And I? I drew the upland air into my lungs, and the scent of the recovered *macchia* through my nostrils, and inhaled it as a man inhales tobacco-smoke, and could have whooped for joy. Not by one-fifth was the scent so intense as I have since smelt it in spring, when all Corsica breaks into flower; yet intense enough and exhilarating after the dank odours of the valley. But the colours! On a sudden the *macchia* had burst into fruit—carmine berries of the sarsaparilla, upon which a few late flowerets yet drooped, duller berries of the lentisk, olive-like berries of the phillyria, velvet purple berries of the myrtle, and (putting all to shade) yellow and scarlet fruit of the arbutus, clustering like fairy oranges, here and there so thickly that the whole thicket was

afire and aflame, enough to have deceived Moses! God, how good to see it and be alive!

Marc'antonio bore me up through the swimming air and laid me in the shadow of the cave—*her* cave. It was empty as she had left it, and my back pressed the very bed of fern on which she had lain, dry now, after long winnowing by the wind that found its way into every crevice of this mountain summit.

How could I choose but think of her? Thinking of her, how could I choose but weary myself in vain speculation, by a hundred guesses attempting to force my way past the edge of the mystery, the sinister shadow which wrapped her round, and penetrate to the heart of it? I recalled her beauty, child-like yet sullen; her eyes, so forthright at times and transparently innocent, yet at times so swiftly clouded with suspicion, not merely shy, but shy with terror, like the eyes of a wild creature entrapped; her bearing, by turns disdainful and defiant with a guarded shame. This turf, these boulders, had made her bower, these matted creepers her curtain. Here she had lived secure among savage men, each one of them ready to die—so Marc'antonio assured me, and all that I had seen confirmed it—rather than injure a hair of her head or suffer it to be injured. She was a king's daughter. Yet this lad of the Rocca Serras, noble, of the best blood of the island, had

turned his own gun upon himself rather than wed with her.

I thought much upon this lad Rocca Serra. Why had he died? Was it for loathing her? But men do not easily loathe such beauty. Was it for love of her? But men do not slay themselves for fortunate love. Had *her* loathing been in some way the secret of his despair? I recalled my words to her, and how she had answered them, turning in the steep track among the pines—"I am your hostage. Do with me what you will." "*If I could! Ah, if I could!*" I liked to think that the lad had loved her and been disdained; yet I pitied him for being disdained, and half-hated him for having dared to love her. Yes, for certain he had loved her. But, if so, her secret had need be as strange almost as that of Sara, the daughter of Raguel, whom seven husbands married, to perish on the marriage eve—"*for a wicked spirit loveth her, which hurteth nobody but those which come unto her.*"

In dreams I found myself travelling beyond the grave in search of this dead lad, to question him; and not seldom would awake with these lines running in my head, remembered as old perplexing favourites with my father, though God knows how I took a fancy that they held the clue:

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost
  Who dy'd before the God of Love was born.
I cannot think that he, who then loved most,
  Sunk so low as to love one which did scorn.
But since this god produc'd a Destiny,
And that Vice-Nature Custom lets it be,
    I must love her that loves not me.

. . . . . .

O, were we waken'd by this tyranny
T'ungod this child again, it could not be
  I should love her who loves not me.

Rebel and Atheist too, why murmur I
  As though I felt the worst that love could do?
Love may make me leave loving, or might try
  A deeper plague—to make her love me too;
Which, since she loves before, I'm loth to see:
Falsehood is worse than hate: and that must be
    If she whom I love should love me.

Many wild conjectures I made and patiently built upon, which, if I were to write them down here, would merely bemuse the reader or drive him to think me crazy. There on my enchanted mountain summit, ringed about day after day by the silent land, removed from all human company but Marc'antonio's, with no clock but the sun and no calendar but the creeping change of season upon the *macchia*, what wonder if I forgot human probabilities at times in piecing and unpiecing solutions of a riddle which itself cried out against nature?

Marc'antonio was all the while as matter-of-fact as a good nurse ought to be. He had fashioned me a capital pair of crutches out of boxwood, and no sooner could I creep about on them than he began to discourse, over the campfire, on the hunting excursions we were soon to make together.

"*Piano, piano;* we will grow strong, and get our hand in by little and little. At first there will be the blackbirds and the foxes——"

"You shoot foxes in Corsica?" I asked.

Marc'antonio stared at me. "And why not, cavalier? You would not have us run after them and despatch them with the stiletto!"

I endeavoured to explain to him the craft and mystery of fox-hunting as practised in England. He shook his head over it, greatly bewildered.

"It seems a long ceremony for one little fox," was his criticism.

"But if we did it with less ritual the foxes would disappear out of the country," I answered him.

"And why not?"

This naturally led me into a discourse on preserving game and on our English game laws, which, I regret to say, gravelled him utterly.

"A peace of God for foxes and partridges! Why, what do you allow, then, for a *man*?"

I explained that we did not shoot men in England. His jaw dropped.

"Mbè! In the name of the Virgin, whatever do you do with them?"

"We hang them sometimes, and sometimes we fight duels with them." I expounded in brief the distinction between these processes and their formalities, whereat he remained for a long while in a brown study.

"Well," he admitted, "by all accounts you English have achieved liberty; but, *per Bacco*, you do strange things with it!"

". . . Blackbirds, to begin with," he went on, "and foxes, and a hare, maybe. Then in the next valley there are boars—small, and wild, and fierce, but our great half-tame ones have driven them off this mountain. After them we will extend ourselves and stalk for deer."

He described the deer to me, and its habits. It was, as I made out, an animal not unlike our red deer, but smaller, and of a duller coat; shy, too, and scarce. He gave me reasons for this. In summer the Corsican shepherds, each armed with a gun, pasture their sheep on the mountains, in winter along the plains and valleys; in either season driving off the poor stag, which in summer is left to range the parched lowlands and in winter the upper snows. Of

late years, however, owing to the unsettled state of politics, the shepherds pastured not half the numbers of sheep that Marc'antonio remembered in his youth, and by consequence the deer had multiplied and grown bolder. He could promise me a stag. Nay, he even hoped that owing to these same causes the *mufri* were pushing down by degrees to the seaboard from the inland mountains, which they mostly haunted. Ah, that was sport for kings! If fortune, one of these fine days, would send us a full-grown *mufrone* now!

But we began upon the blackbirds. I remember yet my first, and how, while I stood trembling a little with that excitement which only a sick man can know who takes up his gun again, Marc'antonio held up the bird and ripped open its crop, filled to bursting with myrtle-berries; and the exquisite violet scent they exhaled.

Already I had flung my crutches away, and three weeks later we were after the deer in good earnest. I had lost all account of time; but winter was upon us, with a wealth of laurestinus flower upon the *macchia* and a sense of stillness in the air such as we feel at home on windless, sunny mornings in December after a night of frost. We had started before dawn, and crossed the valley by the track leading past our deserted hut and up between the

granite pinnacles on which, as the sunset touched them, I had so often gazed. We had followed it up beyond the pines and over a pass leading out among a range of undulating foot-hills, which seemed to waver and lose heart a dozen times before making up their minds to unite and climb, and be a snow-capped mountain. But they mounted to the snows at length, and the snows had driven down the stag which, under Marc'antonio's guidance, I stalked for two hours, and shot before noon-day. We left him in the track, to be recovered as we returned, and very cautiously made our way to the crest of the next ridge. I chose a granite boulder for my mark, gained it, crawled under its lee, and, peering over, had whipped my gun to my shoulder and very nearly pulled the trigger—was, in fact, looking along the sight—when I found that I was aiming at a man; and not only that, but at Billy Priske!

I believe on my faith that thenceforward he owed his life to the shape of his legs—so unlike a deer's.

He was picking his way across the dry bed of a torrent in the dip not fifty yards below us, leaping from slab to slab of outcropping granite as a man crosses a brook by stepping-stones; and upon a slab midway he halted, drew off his hat, extracted a handkerchief, and stood polishing his bald head while he took stock of the climb before him.

"Billy! Billy Priske!"

He tilted his head still higher, towards the ridge and the rock on which I stood against his sky-line, frantically waving.

"Hoo-roar!"

". . . And to think, lad," he panted, ten minutes later, as he stretched himself on the heath beside me —"to think of your mistaking me for a deer!"

"Did I say so, Billy? Then I lied. It was for a *mufro* I took you. Marc'antonio here had as good as promised me one."

His beaming smile changed on the instant to a look of extreme gravity. "See you, lad," he said, "have you ever come across one of these here wild sheep?"

"Not yet."

"I thought not. Well, I have; and I advise you not to talk irreligious about 'em."

"I will talk about nothing," said I, "until you tell me how my father is, and of all your adventures."

"He's well, lad—hearty, and well, and thriving. And he sends you his love, and a paper for your friend here. 'Tis from the Princess; and the upshot is, you're released from your word and free to come back with me."

Marc'antonio, proud of an opportunity to display his scholarship, broke the seal and read the letter

with a magisterial frown, which changed, however, to a pleasant, friendly smile as he handed it across to me.

"Your captivity is at an end, cavalier. You said well, after all, that your patience would win the day."

"*My* patience, Marc'antonio? What, then, of yours?"

The tears sprang suddenly to his eyes, good fellow that he was, and now my good friend. I stretched out a hand, and he grasped and held it for a moment between his twain. We used no more words.

"So my father is with the Princess?" I asked, turning on Billy, who stared—and excusably—at this evidence of our emotion.

"No, he isn't," said Billy; "leastways, he was with her when I left him, at a place called Olmeta, or something of the sort. But by this time he's gone north again."

"And why goes he north?"

"Because that's where the Genoese have shut up the lady."

"Meaning the Queen Emilia?"

Billy nodded.

"And you have travelled the length of Corsica alone to tell me this and take me back with you?"

"No, I didn't. Leastways—" Billy opened his

bag of provender, selected a crust, and began to munch it very deliberately. "There's a saying," he went on between mouthfuls, "about somebody or other axin' more questions in one breath than a wise man can answer in a week; and, likewise, there's another saying that even a bagpipe won't speak till his belly be full. Well, now, as for coming alone, in the first place and in round numbers I didn't; and as for coming to tell you this, partly it was and partly it wasn't; and as for your going back with me, that's for you to choose."

"Well, then," said I, humouring him, "we will take you point by point, in order. To begin with, you did not come alone—*ergo*, you had company. What company?"

"Very poor company, lad, and by name Stephanu. That hatchet-faced Prince Camillo chose him out for a guide to me—" Billy paused, with his mouth open for a bite. "Why, whatever is the matter?" he asked; for I had turned to translate this to Marc'antonio, and Marc'antonio had started up with a growl and an oath.

"Did Stephanu come willingly?" I asked.

"As I was saying, the Prince chose him for guide to me, and he couldn't have chosen a worse one. If you'll believe me, there wasn't an ounce of comfort in the man from the start; and this morning, having

put me in the road so that I couldn't miss it, he turned back and left me—in a desperate hurry, too."

I glanced at Marc'antonio, who had risen and was striding to and fro upon the ridge with his fists clenched. There was mischief here for a certainty, and Stephanu's behaviour confirmed it. For a moment, however, I forbore to translate further, and resumed my catechising of Billy.

"In the second place you came with my release, and to bring me news, and—with what purpose beside?"

"Why, with a message for the ship, to be sure."

"The ship?" I stared at him. "What ship?"

"Why, the *Gauntlet* ketch! You don't tell me," said Billy, with a glance westward, where, however, the hills intervened and hid the coast from us—"you don't tell me you haven't sighted her! But she's here, lad—she *must* be here! Your father sent home word by her that she was to be back wi' reinforcements by the first day of November; and did you ever in your life know your uncle disappoint him?"

"Marc'antonio," said I, "what is this I hear from Billy about a ship?"

Marc'antonio gave a start, and looked from me to Billy in evident confusion.

"Truly, cavalier, there was a ship. . . . I spied her there three days ago, at sunset, making for the island."

"Was she the same ship that first brought us to the island?"

"She was very like," he answered unwillingly. "Yes, indeed, cavalier, I have no doubt she was the same ship."

"And you never told me! Nay, I see now why for these three days we have been hunting to the east of our camp, and always where the coast was hidden—yes, yes, I see now a score of tricks you have played me while I trusted to your better knowledge . . . Marc'antonio," I said sternly, "did you indeed believe so ill of me as that at sight of the ship I should forget my *parole*?"

"It was not that, cavalier; believe me, it was not that. I feared——"

"Speak on, man."

"I feared you might forget our talks together, and, when your release came, forget also that other adventure on which I had hoped to bind you. The Princess——"

"Then your fear, my friend, did me only a little less injustice. You have heard how my father perseveres for a woman's sake; and I am my father's son, I hope. As for the Princess——"

"She is in worse case than ever, cavalier, since they have contrived to get rid of Stephanu."

"On the contrary, my friend, her case is hopeful at length; since this release sets us free to help her."

We trudged back to the camp, pausing on the way while Marc'antonio skewered the deer's legs and slung him on a pole between us. As we started afresh Billy observed for the first time that I walked with a limp.

"A broken leg," said I carelessly; for it would not have done to tell him all the truth.

"Well, well," said he, content with the explanation, "accidents will happen to them that travel, and a broken leg, they say, is stronger when well set."

"If that's so," said I, "I've a double excuse to be thankful," which he did not understand, as I did not mean him to.

Darkness fell on us a little before we reached the camp. From the first I had recognised there could be no chance to-day of visiting the shore and seeking the *Gauntlet* at her anchorage. We were weary, too, and hungry, and nothing remained to do but light the campfire, cook our supper, and listen to Billy's tale of his adventures, a good part of which will be found in the following chapter. I ought

to say, rather, that Billy and I conversed, while Marc'antonio—for we spoke in English—sat by the fire busy with his own thoughts; and, by his face, they were gloomy ones.

"What puzzles me, Billy," said I, as we parted for the night, "is who can be aboard of the ketch. Reinforcements? Why, what reinforcements could my uncle send?"

"The devil a one of me knows, as the Irishman said," answered Billy cheerfully. "But sent 'em he has, and, if I know anything of Mr. Gervase, they're good ones."

I was up before dawn, and the sun rose over the shoulder of our mountain to find me a mile and more on my way down the track which led to the sea. I passed the clearing and the copse where Nat had taken his wound, and the rock, high on my right, where I had stood and spied him running, the *macchia*-filled hollows and dingles, the wood, the village, still desolate, the graveyard where we had first encamped; and so came to the meadow below it, where Mr. Fett had gathered his mushrooms. It was greener than I remembered it, owing to the autumn rains. . . .

I pulled up with a start. At the foot of the meadow, where the stream ran in a curve between it

and the woods, stood a man. He held a fishing-rod in his hand, and was stepping back to make a cast; but, at a cry from me, paused and turned slowly about.

"Uncle Gervase!"

"My *dear* Prosper!" He dropped his rod and advanced, holding out his hands to me. "Why, lad, lad, you have grown to a man in these months!"

"And it really is you, uncle!" I cried again, as yet scarcely believing it, though I clasped him by both hands. "And what are *you* doing here?"

"Why," said he quizzically, "'tis a monstrous confession for this time of the year, but I was fishing for trout; and, what is more, I have taken two, with Walton's number two June-fly, lad—Mr. Grylls's variety—the wings, if you remember, made of the black drake's feathers, with a touch of grey horse-hair on the shank. I wished to know, first, if a Corsican trout would answer to a Cornish fly, and, next, if they keep the same seasons as in England. They do, Prosper—there or thereabouts. To tell you the truth—though, as they say, an angler may catch a fish, but it takes a fisherman to tell the truth about him—I found them woundily out of condition, and restored them, as Mr. Grylls would put it, to their native element."

"You don't tell me that the Vicar is here, too?"

I asked, prepared at this time to be surprised at nothing.

"He is not, lad, though I pleaded with him very earnestly to come, being, as you may guess, put to my wits' end by your father's message."

"But how, then, have you managed?"

"Pretty well, Prosper—pretty well. But come and see for yourself. The *Gauntlet* lies at her old anchorage—or so Captain Pomery tells me—and 'tis but a step down the creek to where my boat is waiting."

We walked down beside the stream, my uncle, as we went, asking a score of questions about our adventures and about my father and his plans; questions which I was in no state of mind to answer coherently. But this mattered the less since he had no leisure to listen to my answers.

I felt, as I said just now, ready to be surprised at nothing. But in this I was mistaken, as I found when we rounded the corner by the creek's head, and my eyes fell on a boat waiting, a stone's throw from the landing-place, and on the crew that manned her.

"Good Lord!" I cried, and stood at a halt.

They were seven—six rowers and a coxswain—and all robed in russet gowns that reached to their ankles. The Trappist monks!

CHAPTER XXI

OF MY FATHER'S ANABASIS; AND THE DIFFERENT TEMPERS OF AN ENGLISH GENTLEMAN AND A WILD SHEEP OF CORSICA

Bright thoughts, clear deeds, constancy, fidelity, bounty, and generous honesty are the gems of noble minds; wherein (to derogate from none) the true heroick English Gentleman hath no peer.—Sir Thomas Browne.

La domesticité n'a eu aucune influence sur le développement intellectuel des *mouflons* que nous avons possédés. . . . Les hommes ne les effrayaient plus; il semblait même que ces animaux eussent acquis plus de confiance dans leur force en apprenant à nous connaître. Sans doute on ne peut point conclure de quelques individus à l'espèce entière; mais on peut assurer sans rien hasarder, que le mouflon tient une des dernières places parmis les mammifères quant à l'intelligence.—Saint-Hilaire et Cuvier, *Histoire Naturelle des Mammifères.*

"You will find them very good fighters," said my uncle. "The most of them, as I understand from Dom Basilio, were soldiers at one time or another before they embraced their present calling."

"But the devil of it is," said I, "how you contrived to enlist 'em?"

My uncle stood still and rubbed the back of his

head. "I don't know, Prosper, that I used any arguments. I just put the case to them; through Dom Basilio, you understand."

"In other words, you made them an eloquent speech."

"I did nothing of the sort," he corrected me hastily. "In the first place because I have never made a speech and couldn't manage one if I tried; and next, because it is against their rules. I just put the case to Dom Basilio. All the credit belongs to him."

Dom Basilio—for the coxswain of the boat proved to be he and no other—gave me a different account as we pulled towards the *Gauntlet*. Yet it agreed with my uncle's in the main.

"In faith," said he, "if there be any credit in what we have done or are about to do, set it down to your uncle. Against goodness so simple no man can strive, though he bind himself by vows. Gratitude may have helped a little; but you can say, and you will not be far out, that for very shame we are here."

Captain Pomery, who hailed me over the ship's side, proudly invited me to row around and inspect the repairs in her—particularly her new stern-post—before climbing on board. For my part, while congratulating him upon them and upon his despatch,

I admired more the faces of Mike Halliday and Roger Wearne, grinning welcome to me over the bulwarks. They, too, called my attention to the repairs; to the new rudder, fitted with chains in case of accident to the helm, to the grain of the new mizzen-mast (a beautiful spar, and without a knot), to the teak hatch-coverings which had replaced those shattered by the explosion. They desired me to marvel at everything; but that they themselves after past perils should be here again and ready, for no more than seamen's pay, to run their heads into perils yet unhandselled, was to these honest fellows no matter worth considering.

"But whither be we bound, Master Prosper?" demanded Captain Jo. "For 'tis ill biding for orders after cracking on to be punctual; and tho' I say naught against the anchorage *as* an anchorage, the wind, what with these hills and gullies, is like Mulligan's blanket, always coming and going; and by fits an' starts as the ague took the goose; and likewise backwards and forwards, like Boscastle fair: so that our cables be twisted worse than a pig's tail."

"As for that," said I, "your next rendezvous, I hear, is the island of Giraglia; but, for the whole plan of campaign, you must come and hear it from Billy Priske, who will tell you what my father has done and what he intends."

Accordingly, after breakfasting aboard, we were landed again and went up the mountain together—my uncle Gervase, Captain Pomery, Dom Basilio, and I: and on the slope below the Princess's cave we sat and listened to Billy's story, the Trappist translating it to Marc'antonio, who sat with his gun across his knees and his eyes fastened on my uncle's gentle, venerable face.

Billy Priske's Story of My Father's Campaign

"As Master Prosper has told you, gentlemen all, we left him sitting alongside poor Mr. Fiennes, and took the path that leads down and across the valley yonder and out again on the north side. There were four of us—my master, myself, and the creatures Fett and Badcock—each man with his gun and good supply of ammunition. Besides this Sir John carried his camp-stool and spy-glass, and in his pocket a map along with his Bible and tobacco-pouch; I the wine and his spare gun; Fett the bag of provisions; and Badcock his flute and a gridiron."

"Why a gridiron?" asked my uncle.

"The reason he gave, sir, was that it's just these little things that get left behind, on a picnic; which Sir John, when I reported it, pronounced to be a very good reason. 'And, as it happens,' said he,

'tis the very reason why Mr. Badcock himself goes with us: for my son, when he becomes king, will need a Fool, and I have brought a couple in case of accidents.'

"We started then, as Master Prosper will remember, a little before dark; and, having lanterns to light the track, and now and then the north star between the tree-tops to give us our bearings, we crossed the valley and came out through a kind of pass upon a second slope, a little nor'-west of the spot where I happened yesterday on Master Prosper. By this, Sir John's watch marked ten o'clock, and, finding us dead-beat by the roughness of the track, he commanded us to lie down and sleep.

"The next morning, after studying his map, he started afresh, still holding northward in the main but bearing back a little to the left—that is, towards the sea, which before noon we brought in sight at a place he called La Piana, where (he said) was a fishing village: and so no doubt there was, for we spied a two-three boats moored a little way out from the shore—looking down upon them through a cleft in the rocks. The village itself we did not see, but skirted it upon high ground and came down to the foreshore a short two miles beyond it; where we found a beach and a spit of rock, and on the spit a tumble-down tower standing, as lonely as a combed

louse. Above the beach ran a tolerable coast-road, which divided itself into two, after crossing a bridge behind the tower; the one following the shore, the other striking inland up the devil of a gorge. This inland road we took, for two reasons: the first, that by the map it appeared to cut off a corner of our journey; the second, because the map showed a village, not three miles up the gorge, where we might get advice.

"After an hour's climbing then (for the road twisted uphill along the edge of the torrent) we came to the village, which was called Otta. Now the first thing to happen to us in Otta was that we found it empty—not so much as a dog in the street—but all the inhabitants on the hill above, in a crowd before a mighty great stone: and Badcock would have it that they were gathered together in fear of us. But the true reason turned out to be something quite different. For this stone overhangs the village, which is built on a stiff slope; and though it has hung there for hundreds of years without moving, the villagers can never be easy that it will not tumble on top of them; and once a year regularly, and at odd times when the panic takes them, they march up and tie it with ropes. This very thing they were doing as we arrived, and all because some old woman had dreamed of an earthquake. We took notice that

in the crowd and in the gang binding the stone there was no man the right side of fifty (barring a cripple or two); the reason being, as it turned out, that all their young men had enlisted in the militia.

"These people made us welcome (and I will say, gentlemen, once for all and in spite of what has happened to Master Prosper here, that there is no such folk as the Corsicans for kindness to strangers), but they told us we were on the wrong road. By following the pass we should find ourselves in forest-tracks which indeed would lead us down to the great plain of the Niolo and across it to Corte, whence a good road ran north to Cape Corso; but our shorter way was the coast-road, which (they added) we must leave before reaching Calvi—for fear of the Genoese—and take a southerly one which wound through the mountains to Calenzana. They explained this many times to Sir John, and Sir John explained it to us; and, learning that we were English, and therefore friends of liberty, they forced us to drink wine with them—lashins of wine—until just as my head was beginning to feel muzzy, some one called out that we were heroes and must drink the wine of heroes, the pride of Otta, the Invincible St. Cyprien.

"By this time we were all as sociable together as mice in malt, except that these Corsicans never laughed at all, but stared at us awesome-like even

when the creature Fett put one foot on a chair and another on the table and made 'em a long tomfool speech in English, calling 'em friends, Romans, and countrymen and asking them to lend him their ears, as though his own weren't long enough. Then they brought in the Invincible St. Cyprien, and Sir John poured out a glass, and sniffed and tasted it and threw up his head, gazing round on the company and looking every man full in the eyes. I can't tell you why, gentlemen, but his bearing seemed so noble to me at that moment I felt I could follow him to the death (though of course there wasn't the leastest need for it, just then). I reached out for the bottle, filled myself a glass, drank it off, and stared around just as defiant. It gave me a very pleasant feeling in the pit of the stomach, and the taste of it didn't seem calculated to hurt a fly. So I took two more glasses quickly, one after the other; and every one looked at me with their faces very bright all of a sudden—and the room itself grown brighter—and to my astonishment I heard them calling upon me in English for a speech. Whereby, being no public speaker, I excused myself and walked out into the village street, which was bright as day with the moon well over the cliffs on the other side of the gorge, and (to my surprise) crowded with people so that I couldn't have believed the whole City of London

held half the number, let alone a God-forsaken hole like Otta. I stood for a while on the doorstep counting 'em, and the next thing I remember was crossing the street to a low wall overhanging the gorge and leaning upon it and watching the cliffs working up and down like mine-stamps. This struck me as curious, and, after thinking it over, I made up my mind to climb across and discover the reason."

"I fear, Billy," said my uncle, "that you must have been intoxicated."

"—But the worst, sir, was the moon; which was not like any ordinary moon, but kept swelling and bursting in showers of the most beautiful fireworks, so that I said to myself 'O for the wings of a dove,' I said, 'so that I fetch some one to put a stop to this!' And I'd hardly said the words before it was broad day, and me lying in the street with a small crowd about me, very solemn and curious, and my head in the lap of a middle-aged woman that smelt of garlic, but without any pretensions to looks. And she was lifting up her head and singing a song, and the sound of it as melancholy as a gib-cat in a garden of cucumbers. Whereby the whole crowd stood by and stared, without offering to help. Whereby I said to myself 'This is a pretty business, and no mistake.' Whereby I saw Sir John come forth from the house where the drinking had been, and his face

was white but his step steady: and says he, 'What have you been doing to this woman?' 'Nothing at all,' said I; 'or, leastways, nothing to warrant this behaviour on her part.' 'Well,' said he, 'you may be surprised to hear it, but she maintains that you are betrothed to her.' 'A man,' said I, 'may woo where he will, but must wed where his wife is. If this woman be my fate, I'll say no more except that 'tis hard: but as for courting her, I never did so.' 'You are in a worse case than you guess,' said he; 'for, to begin with, the lady is a widow; and, secondly, she is marrying you, not for your looks, but for revenge.' 'Why, what have I done?' said I. 'Nothing at all,' said he; 'but from what I can hear of it, five years ago a man of Evisa, up the valley, stole a goat belonging to this woman's husband; whereupon the husband took a gun and went to Evisa and shot the thief's cousin, mistaking him for the thief; whereupon the thief came down to Otta and shot the honest man one day while he was gathering olives in his orchard. He himself left neither chick nor child; but his kinsmen of the family of Paolantonuccio took up the quarrel, and with so much liveliness that to-day but three of them survive, and these are serving with the militia just now. For the while, therefore, the Widow Paolantonuccio has no one to carry on the custom of the country;

nor will have until a husband offers.' 'For pity's sake, Sir John,' said I, 'get me out of this! Tell them that if any man has been courting this woman 'tis not I, William Priske, but another in my image.' 'Why, to be sure!' cried Sir John. 'It must have been the Invincible St. Cyprien!'

"So stepping back and seating himself again upon the doorstep, he began to argue with the villagers, the woman standing sullen all the while and holding me by the arm. I could not understand a word, of course, but later on he told me the heads of his discourse.

"'I began,' he said, 'by expounding to them all the doctrine of cross-revenge, or *vendetta trasversa* as they call it; and this I did for two reasons—the first because in an argument nothing succeeds like telling a man something he knows already—the second because it proved to them, and to me, that I wasn't drunk. For the doctrine is a complicated one.

"'Next I taught them that the doctrine was damnable, and had been pronounced to be damnable by their beloved leader Pascal Paoli; and that it robbed Corsica of men who should be fighting the Genoese, on which errand we were bound.

"'And lastly I proved to them on the authority of several wise philosophers (some of Greece, and others of my own invention, that a man with three glasses

of their wine in his belly was a man possessed, and therefore that either nothing had happened, or, if anything had happened, the fellow to blame must be that devil of a warrior the Invincible St. Cyprien.

"'Yet (as so often happens) the argument that really persuaded them, as I believe, was one I never used at all: which was, that the woman had money and a parcel of land, and albeit no man could pick up courage to marry her, they did not relish a stranger stepping in and cutting them out.'

"Be that as it may, gentlemen, in twenty minutes the crowd had come round to Sir John's way of thinking: and they not only sold us mules at thirty livres apiece—which Sir John knew to be the fair current price—but helped us to truss up Mr. Fett and Mr. Badcock, each on his beast, and walked with us back to the cross-roads, singing hymns about Corsican liberty. Only we left the woman sadly cast down.

"From the cross-roads, where they left us and turned back, our road led through a great forest of pines. Among these pines hung thousands of what seemed to be balls of white cotton, but were the nests of a curious caterpillar; which I only mention because Mr. Fett, recovering himself, picked up one of these caterpillars and slipped it down the nape of Mr. Badcock's neck, whereby the poor man was

made uncomfortable all that day and the next: for the hairs of the insect turned out to be full of poison. In the end we were forced to strip him and use the gridiron upon him for a currycomb; so it came in handy after all.

"On the second day, having crossed a river and come to a village which, if I remember, was called Manso, we bore away southward among the most horrible mountains. Among these we wandered four days, relying always on Sir John's map: but I reckon the man who made it must have drawn the track out of his own head and trusted that no person would ever be fool enough to go there. Hows'ever, the weather keeping mild, we won through the passes with no more damage than the loss of Mr. Fett's mule (which tumbled over a precipice on the third day), and a sore on Mr. Fett's heel brought about by his having to walk the rest of the way into Calenzana.

"Now at Calenzana, a neat town, we found ourselves nearly in sight of Calvi and plumb in sight of the Genoese outposts that were planted a bare gunshot from the house where we lodged, on the road leading northward to Calvi gate. To the south, as we heard—though we never saw them—lay a regiment of Paoli's militia; and between the two forces Calenzana stood as a sort of no-man's-land, albeit the Genoese claimed what they called a 'supervision'

over it. In fact they never entered it, mistrusting its defences, and also the temper of its inhabitants, who were likely enough to rise at their backs if the patriots gave an assault.

"They contented themselves, then, with advancing their outposts to a bend on the Calvi road not fifty yards from our lodging, which happened to be the last house in the suburbs; and from his window, during the two days we waited for Mr. Fett's sore to heal, Sir John would watch the guard being relieved, and sometimes pick up his gun and take long aim at the sentry, but lay it down with a sort of sigh: for though the sight of a Genoese was poison to him, he reckoned outpost-shooting as next door to shooting a fox.

"Our hosts, I should tell you, were an old soldier and his wife. The man, by his own account, followed the trade of a bird-stuffer; which was just an excuse for laziness, for no soul ever entered his shop but to hear him talk of his campaigning under Gaffori and under the great Pascal Paoli's father, Hyacinth Paoli. This he would do at great length, and, for the rest, lived on his wife, who was a well-educated woman and kept a school for small children when they chose to come, which again was not often.

"This Antonio, as we called him, kept in his shop

and in a pen behind it a young ram, which was his pet and the pride of Calenzana: for, to begin with, it was a wild ram; and in addition to this it was tame; and, to cap all, it wasn't a bit like a ram. And yet it was a wild ram—a wild Corsican ram.

"Being an active sort of man in his way, though well over fifty, and given to wandering on the mountains above Calenzana, he had come one day upon a wild sheep with a lamb running at her heels. He let fly a shot (for your Corsican, Master Prosper, always carries a gun) and ran forward. The mother made off, but the lamb, scared out of its wits, sat and squatted like a hare; and so Antonio took him up and carried him home.

"By the time we came to Calenzana the brute had grown to full size, with horns almost two feet long. As we should reckon, they were twisted the wrong way for a ram's, and for fleece he had a coat like a Gossmoor pony's, brown and hairy. But a ram he was; and, the first night, when Mr. Badcock obliged us with a solo on the flute, he came forward and stared at him for a time and then butted him in the stomach.

"We had to carry the poor man to bed. We slept, all four of us, in a loft, which could only be reached by a ladder; and a ram, as you know, can't climb a ladder. It's out of nature. Yet the brute tried its

best, having taken such a fancy to Badcock, and wouldn't be denied till his master beat him out of doors with a fire-shovel and penned him up for the night.

"The next morning, being loosed, he came in to breakfast with the family—as his custom was—and butted a crock of milk all over the kitchen hearth, but otherwise bore himself like a repentant sinner; the only difference being that from breakfast onward he turned away from his master and took to following Mr. Fett, who didn't like the attention at all. Badcock kept to his bed; and Mr. Fett too, who could only manage to limp a little, climbed up to the loft soon after midday and lay down for a rest.

"Sir John and I, left alone downstairs, took what we called a siesta, each in his chair and Sir John's chair by the shaded window. For my part, I was glad enough of forty winks, and could have enlisted among the Seven Sleepers after those cruel four days in the mountains. So, with Sir John's permission, I dozed off; and sat up, by and by—awake all of a sudden at the sound of my master's stirring—to see him at the window with his gun half-lifted to his shoulder, and away up the road a squad of Genoese soldiers marching down to relieve guard.

"With that there came a yell from the loft overhead. I sprang up, rubbing my eyes, and, between

rubbing 'em, saw Sir John lower his gun and stand back apace. The next instant—*thud, thud!*—over the eaves upon the roadway dropped Fett and Badcock, and picked themselves up as if to burst in through the window. No good! A second later that ram was on top of them.

"How he had contrived to climb up the ladder and butt the pair over the roof, there's no telling. But there he was; and, gathering up his legs from the fall as quick as lightning, he headed them off from the house and up the road. There was no violence. So far as one could tell from the clouds of dust, he never hurt 'em once, but through the dust we could see the Genoese staring as he nursed the pair up the road straight into their arms. The queer part of it," wound up Billy reflectively, "was that, after the first moment, Sir John had never the chance of a shot. You may doubt me, gentlemen, but Sir John is a shot in a thousand, and, what with the dust and the confusion, there was never a chance without risk to human life. The Genoese giving back, in less than half a minute the road was clear."

"But what happened?" asked my uncle.

"Well, sir, this here Corsica being an island, it follows that they must have stopped somewhere. But where, there's no telling."

"You never saw them again."

"Never," said Billy solemnly; and, having asked and received permission to light his pipe, resumed the tale.

"—There being now no reason to loiter in Calenzana, we left the town next morning and rode along the hill tracks to Muro, when again we struck a high-road running northward to the coast. Sir John had sold Mr. Badcock's mule to our good hosts in Calenzana, and here in Muro he parted with our pair also, deeming it safer to travel the next stage on foot; since by all accounts we were about to skirt the Genoese cantonments scattered to the east of Calvi; and although the Corsicans held and patrolled the road, over which a train of waggons travelled daily with material for the new town a-building on the sea-shore, at Isola Rossa, yet there was risk that a couple of riders faring along it without an escort might be snapped up by the enemy. Also Sir John had no mind to be stopped a dozen times and questioned by the Corsican patrols. We kept therefore along the hills to the east of the road; and on our way, having halted and slept a night in an olive orchard about five miles from the coast, we woke up a little after daylight to the sound of heavy guns firing.

"The meaning of this was made plain to us as we fetched our way round to the eastward and came

out at length upon the face of a steep hill that broke away in steep cliffs to the very foreshore. There, below us, lay a neat deep-water roadstead covered to westward by a small island with a tower on it and a battery. The shore ran out towards the island and the two had been joined by a mole, or the makings of one, about thirty yards long; and well back in the bight of the shore, where it curved towards us, was a half-built town, all of new stone, with scaffoldings standing everywhere, yet not a soul at work on 'em. Out in the roadstead five small gunboats were tacking and blazing away, two at the mole and three at the town itself; and the town and the island blazing and banging back at the gunboats. We could not see the town battery, but the island one mounted three guns, and Sir John's spyglass showed the people there running from one to another like emmets.

"Sir John studied the boats and the town through his glass for five minutes, and after them the inshore water and the beach on our side of the town, that was of white sand with black rocks here and there and ran down pretty steep as it neared the foot of our hill. 'If those fellows had any sense—' he began to say, and with that, as if struck by a sudden thought, he looked close around him, and then at the edge of the cliff where it broke away

below us; and the next moment he was down on his stomach and crawling to the brink for a look below. I did the same, of course; and overtook him just as he drew back his head, and gave a sort of whistle, looking me in the face—as well he might; for right beneath us lay a sixth gunboat and the crew of her ashore already with a six-pounder and hoisting it by a tackle to a slab of rock about fifty feet above the water's edge. A neater spot they couldn't have chosen, for it stood at an angle the town battery couldn't answer to (which was plain, from its sending no shot in this direction) and yet it raked the whole town front as easy as ninepins.

"To make things a bit fairer, these Genoese gentry offered us as simple pretty a target as any man could wish for; nothing to do but fire down on 'em at forty yards, bob back and reload, with ne'er a chance of their climbing up to do us a mischief or even to count how many we were. I touched Sir John's elbow and tapped my gun-stock, and for the moment he seemed to think well of it. 'Cut the tackle first,' said he, lifting his gun. ''Twill be as good as hamstringing 'em': and for him the shot would have been child's play. But after a second or two he lowered his piece and drew back. 'Dam-me,' said he, 'I'm losing my wits. Let 'em do their work first, and we'll get gun and all. If only'—and

here he looked nervous-like over his shoulder up the hill—'those fellows from the town don't hurry hither and spoil sport!'

"I couldn't see his face, but I could feel that he was chuckling as the fellows below us swung up the gun and fixed it in position and handed up the round shot. But when they followed up with two kegs of powder and dumped 'em on to the platform, my dear master's hand went up and he rubbed the back of his head in pure delight. After that—as I thought, for nothing but frolic—he even let 'em load and train the gun for us, and only lifted his musket when the gunner—a dark-faced fellow with a red cap on his head—was act'lly walking up with the match alight in his linstock.

"'I don't want to hurt that man afore 'tis necessary,' says Sir John; and with that he takes aim and lets fly, and shears the linstock clean in two, right in the fellow's hand. I saw the end of it—match and all—fly half-way across the platform, and popped back my head as the dozen Genoese there turned their faces up at us. The pity was, we hadn't time for a look at 'em!

"Sir John had warned me to hold my fire! But neither he nor I was prepared for what happened next. For first one of them let out a yell, and right on top of it half a dozen were screaming '*Imboscata!*

imboscata!'—and with that we heard a rush of feet and, looking over, saw the last two or three scrambling for dear life off the edge of the platform and down the rocks to their boat.

"'Quick, Billy—quick! Damme, but we'll risk it!' cried Sir John, snatching up his spare gun. 'If we make a mess of it,' says he, 'plug a bullet into one of the powder kegs! Understand?' says he.

"'Sakes alive, master!' says I. 'You bain't a-going to clamber down that gizzy-dizzy place sure 'nuff!'

"'Why, o' course I be,' says he, and already he had his legs over and was lowering himself. 'Turn on your back, stick out your heels, and hold your gun wide of you, *so*,' says he; 'and you'll come to no harm.'

"Well, as it happened, I didn't. Not for a hundred pound would I go down that cliff again in cold blood, and my stomach turns wambly in bed o' nights when I dream of it. But down it I went on the flat of my back with my heels out, as Sir John recommended, and with my eyes shut, about which he'd said nothing. I felt my jacket go rip from tail to collar—you can see the rent in it for yourselves—and my shirt likewise, and what happened to the seat of my breeches 'twould be a scandal to mention. But in two shakes or less we were at the

bottom of the cliff together safe and sound, and not a moment too soon, neither: for as I picked myself up I saw Sir John stagger across and catch up the burning fuse that lay close alongside one of the powder kegs. Whereby, although the danger was no sooner seen than over, I pretty near turned sick on the spot.

"But Sir John gave me no time. 'Hooray!' he sings out. 'Help me to slew this blessed gun round, and we'll sink boat and all for 'em unless she slips her moorings quick!"

"Well, sir, that was the masterpiece. We heaved and strained, and inside of two minutes we had it trained upon the gunboat. The men that had quitted the platform were down by the shore before this; and a dozen had pushed their boat off and sat in her, some pulling, others backing, and all jabbering and disputing whether to return and take off the five or six that stood in a huddle by the water's edge and were crying out not to be left behind. And meantime on the gunboat some were shouting to 'em not to be a pack of cowards—for the crew on board could see us on the platform (which the others couldn't) and that we were only two—and others were running to cut her cable, seeing the gun trained on 'em and not staying to think that the wind was light and the current setting straight onshore. And

in the midst of this Sir John finds a fresh fuse, and lights it from the old one, and bang! says we.

"It took her plump in the stern-works, knocking her wheel and taffrail to flinders and ripping out a fair six feet of her larboard bulwarks. This much I saw while the smoke cleared; but Sir John was already calling for the reload. The Genoese by good luck had left a rammer; and the pair of us had charged her and were pushing home shot number two as merry as crickets, when we heard a horn blown on the hill above us, and at the same instant spied a body of Corsicans on the beach below, marching towards us from the town.

"Well, Sir John decided that we might just as well have a second shot at the boat while our hand was in; and so we did, but trained it too high in our excitement and did no damage beyond knocking a hole in her mainsail. And our ears hadn't lost the noise of it before a man put his head over the cliff above and spoke to us very politely in Corsican.

"He seemed to be asking the way down; for Sir John pointed to the way we had come. Whereby he laughed and shook his head. And a dozen others that had gathered beside him looked down too and laughed and waved their hands to us. By and by they went off, still waving, to look for a better way down: but they took a good twenty minutes to reach

us, and before this the gunboat had drifted close upon the rocks and no hope for it but to surrender to the party marching along the beach and now close at hand.

"Well, sirs, the upshot was that this party, which had marched out for a forlorn hope, took the gunboat and her crew as easily as a man gathers mushrooms. And the rest of the boats, dispirited belike, sheered off after another hour's banging and left the roadstead in peace. But while this was happening the party on the cliffs had worked their way down to our rock by a sheep-track on the western side, and the first man to salute us was the man who had first spoken us from the top of the cliff: and this, let me tell you, was no less a person than the General himself."

"The General?" exclaimed my uncle.

"The General Paoli, sir: a fresh-complexioned man and fairer-skinned than any Corsican we had met on our travels; tall, too, and upstanding; dressed in green and gold with black spatterdashes and looking at one with an eye like a hawk's. Compliments fly when gentlefolk meet. Though as yet I didn't know him from Adam, 'twas easy to mark him for a person of quality by the way he lifted his hat and bowed. Sir John bowed back, though more stiffly; and the more compliments the General paid him,

the stiffer he grew and the shorter his answers, till by and by he said in English 'I think you know a little of my language, sir: enough, at any rate, to take my meaning?'

"The General bowed again at this, still keeping his smile. 'You do not wish my men to overhear? Yes, yes, I speak the English—a very little—and can understand it, if you will be so good as to speak slowly.'

"'Very well then, sir,' said Sir John; 'if I and my man here have been of some small service to you to-day I count myself happy to have obliged so noble a patriot as Signor Pascal Paoli.' And here they both bowed again. 'But I must warn you, sir, that my service here is due only to the Queen Emilia, whom you also should serve, and whom I am sworn to seek and save. The Genoese have shut her, I believe, in Nonza, in Cape Corso.'

"The General frowned a bit at this, but in a moment smiled at him in an open way that was honest too, as any one could see. 'I have later news of the Queen Emilia,' said he; 'which is that the Genoese have removed her to the island of Giraglia off Cape Corso. I fear, sir, you will not lightly reach her.'

"'I will reach her or die,' said Sir John stoutly.

"The General glanced at the Genoese gunboats.

'At present it is hopeless,' said he; 'but I tell you frankly that in two months I hope to clear the sea of those gentry yonder. Meantime, if you are determined to press on to Cape Corso, I'll beg you to accept a pass from me which will save trouble if you fall in, as you will, with my militia. You who have done me so generous a service to-day will not refuse so cheap a token of gratitude.'

"Those were the General's words, sirs, as I heard them and got them by heart. And Sir John took the pass from him scribbled there and then on the fly-leaf of the General's pocket Bible—and put it carefully between the leaves of his own: and so, having led us back along the track by which he and his men had come, the General pointed out our way to us and bade us farewell in the Lord's name. He saw that my master wanted no thanks, and a gentleman (as they say) would rather be unmannerly than troublesome.

"That, sirs, is all my story, except that by the help of the General's pass we made our way up the long length of Cape Corso: and at first Sir John, learning there were yet some Genoese left in a valley they call Luri, pitched his camp at the head of it, and day by day took out his camp-stool and stalked the mountains till little by little he cleared the valley, driving the enemy down to the *marina* in

terror of his sharp-shooting. After that we lodged for a while in a tower on the top of a crag, where (the country people said) a famous old Roman had once lived out his exile. Last of all we moved to the shore opposite the island of Giraglia; but the Genoese had burnt the village which formerly stood there. Among the ruins we camped, and day after day my master conned the island across the strait, waiting for the time when the *Gauntlet* should be due. A tower stands in the island, which is but a cliff of bare rock, and there must be deep water close inshore, for once a Genoese vessel drew alongside and landed stores: but, for the rest, day after day, my master could see through his glass no sign of life but a sentry or two on the platform above the landing-quay.

"At last there came a day when, from a goatherd who brought us meat and wine from the next *paese*, we learned that a body of armed men, Corsicans, had pushed up to Olmeta, near by Nonza, to press the Genoese garrison there. Sir John, sick of waiting idle, proposed that we should travel back and help them, if only to fill up the time. It would be on our way, at any rate, to send word to the ketch, which was near about due. So we travelled back to Olmeta; and behold! we tumbled upon the Princess and her men who had first taken us prisoners; and

the Princess's brother with her—and be dashed if I like his looks! So Sir John told his tale, and the Princess sent me along with Master Prosper's letter of release. And here's a funny thing now!" wound up Billy, glancing at me. "The Prince was willing enough your release should be sent, and even chose out that fellow Stephanu to come along with me. But something in his eye—I can't azackly describe it —warned me he had a sort of reason for thinking that 'twouldn't do you much good. There was a priest, too: I took a notion that *he* didn't much expect to see you again, sir. And this kept me in a sweat every mile of the journey, so that when you pointed your gun at me yesterday, as natural as life, you might have knocked me down with a feather."

"Then it is settled," decided my uncle as Billy came to a full stop. "Sir John has gone north again, you say, and will be expecting us off the island? There's naught to prevent our starting this evening?"

"Nothing at all," agreed Captain Pomery, to whom by a glance he had appealed. "Leastways and supposing I can get my hawsers out of curl-papers."

"That suits you, Prosper?" asked my uncle.

I looked across the fire at Marc'antonio, who sat with his eyes lowered upon the gun across his knees.

"Marc'antonio," said I, "my friends here are proposing to sail northward to Cape Corso to-night. They require me to sail with them. Am I free, think you?"

"Beyond doubt, you are free, cavalier," answered Marc'antonio, still without lifting his eyes.

"Now for my part," I said, "I am not so sure. Suppose—look at me, please, my friend—suppose that you and I were to go first to the Princess together and ask her leave?"

My uncle gazed up at Marc'antonio, who had sprung to his feet; and—after a long look at his face—from Marc'antonio to me.

"Prosper," he said quietly, "we shall sail to-night. If we sail without you, will your father forgive us? That is all I ask."

"Dear uncle," said I, "for the life of me I cannot tell you; but that in my place he would do the like, I am sure."

CHAPTER XXII

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

He that luvith a starre
  To follow her, sinke or swym,
Hath never a feare how farre,
  For the world it longith to hym:
For the road it longith to hym
  And the fieldes that marcche beside—
Lift up thi herte, my maister then,
  So mery to-morn we ride.—*The Squyres Delyt.*

So the *Gauntlet* sailed for the island of Giraglia; and we two, having watched her for a while as she stood out to make her offing, trod out our campfire and turned our faces northward. Marc'antonio's last action before starting was to unhobble the goats and free the hogs from their wooden collars and headpieces. As he finished operating he turned them loose one by one with a parting smack on the buttocks, and they ran from us among the thickets, where we heard their squeals change to grunts of delight.

Brutes though they were, I could understand their delight, having lived with them and in even such thraldom as theirs. From my neck also it

seemed that a heavy collar-weight fell loose and slipped itself as, having passed Nat's grave in the hollow, we left the pine-forest at our feet and wound our way up among the granite pinnacles, upward, still upward into the clear air. Aloft there, beyond the pass, the kingdom of Corsica broke on our view, laid out in wide prospect; the distant glittering peaks of Monte d'Oro and Monte Rotondo, the forests hitched on their shoulders like green mantles, the creased valleys leading down their rivers to the shore; a magic kingdom ringed with a sea of iris blue; a kingdom bequeathed to me. A few months ago I had shouted with joy to possess it; to-day, with more admiring eyes, I worshipped it for the lists of my greater adventure; and surely Nat's spirit marched with me to the air of his favourite song:

> If doughty deeds my lady please,
> Right soon I'll mount my steed;
> And strong his arm and fast his seat
> That bears frae me the meed . . .

But, in fact, it was not until the third morning of our journey that Marc'antonio (who, like every Corsican, abhorred walking) was able to purchase us a steed apiece in the shape of two lean and shaggy hill ponies. They belonged to a decayed gentleman —of the best blood in the island, as he assured me—

whom poverty had driven with his family to inhabit a shepherd's hut above the Restorica on the flank of Monte Rotondo where it looks towards Corte. We had slept the night under his roof, and I remember that I was awakened next morning on my bed of dry fern by the small chatter of the children, themselves awaking one by one as the daylight broke. After breakfast our host led us down to the pasture where the ponies were tethered; and when he and Marc'antonio had haggled for twenty minutes, and I was in the act of mounting, three of the children, aged from five downwards, came toddling with bunches of a blue flower unknown to me, but much like a gentian, which they had gathered on the edge of the tumbling Restorica, some way up-stream. I took my bunch and pinned it on my hat as I rode, hailing the omen:

> For you alone I ride the ring,
> For you I wear the blue . . .

And—how went the chorus?

> Then tell me how to woo thee, love;
> O tell me how to woo thee!
> For thy dear sake nae care I'll take——

The only care taken by Marc'antonio was to follow the bridle-tracks winding among the foothills,

and give a wide berth to the high-road running north and south through Corte, especially to the bridges crossing the Golo River, at each of which, he assured me, we should find a guard posted of Paoli's militia. Luckily, he knew all the fords, and in the hill-villages off the road the inhabitants showed no suspicion of us, but took it for granted that we were the good Paolists we passed for. Marc'antonio answered all their guileless questions by giving out that we were two roving commissioners travelling northward to delimit certain *pieve* in the Nebbio, at the foot of Cape Corso—an explanation which secured for us the best of victuals as well as the highest respect.

For a while our course, bending roughly parallel with the Golo, led us almost due east, and at length brought us out upon the flat shore of the Tuscan Sea. Here the mountains, which had confined us to the river valley, run northward with a sharp twist, and, turning with them, we rode once more with our faces set towards our destination, keeping the tall range on our left hand, and on our right the melancholy sea-marshes where men cannot dwell for the malaria, and where for hour after hour we rode in a silence unbroken save by the plash of fish in the lagoon or the cry of a heron solitary among the reeds. This desolation lasted all the way to Bigu-

glia, where we turned aside again among the foothills to avoid the fortress of Bastia and the traffic of the roads about it. Beyond Bastia we were safe in the fastnesses of Cape Corso, across which, from this eastern shore to the western, and to the camp at Olmeta, one only pass (so Marc'antonio informed me) was practicable. I guessed we were nearing it when he began to mutter to himself in the intervals of scanning the crags high on our left; for this was to him, he confessed, an almost unknown country. But the gap, when we came abreast of it, could scarcely be mistaken. With a glance around, as though to take our bearings, he abruptly headed off for it, and, having climbed the first slope, reined up and sat for a moment, rigid in his saddle as a statue, listening.

The sun had sunk behind the range, and the herbage at our feet lay in a bronze shadow; but light still bathed the sea behind us, and over it a company of gulls kept flashing and wheeling and clamouring. While I listened, following Marc'antonio's example, it seemed to me that an echo from the summit directly above us took up the gulls' cry and repeated it, prolonging the note. Marc'antonio lifted and waved a hand.

"That will be Stephanu," he announced; and sure enough, before we had pushed a couple of fur-

longs up the slope, we caught sight of Stephanu descending a steep scree to meet us.

He and Marc'antonio nodded salutation brusquely, as though they had parted but a few hours ago. Marc'antonio, though relieved to see him, wore a judicial frown.

"What of the Princess, O Stephanu?" he demanded.

"The Princess is well enough for aught I know," answered Stephanu, with a glance at me.

"You can speak before the cavalier. He knows not everything until we tell him; but he is one of us, and that I will engage."

Stephanu shrugged his shoulders. "The Princess is well enough for aught I know," he repeated.

"But what fool's talk is this? The Prince packed you off, meaning mischief of some kind—what mischief you, being on the spot, should have been able to guess."

"It is God's truth, then, that I could not," Stephanu admitted sullenly; "and what is more, neither could you in my place have made a guess—no, not with all your wisdom."

"But you travelled back with all speed? You have seen her?"

"I travelled back with all speed." Stephanu repeated the words as a child repeats a lesson, but

whether ironically or not his face did not tell. "Also I have seen her. And that is the devil of it."

"Will you explain?"

"She will have nothing to do with me; nor with you. I told her that you would be upon the road and following close after me. Naturally I said nothing of the cavalier here, for I knew nothing——"

"Did she ask?" I inquired.

Stephanu appeared to search his memory. "Now I come to think of it she *did* let fall a word. . . . But I for my part supposed you to be dead; and, by the way, Signore, you will accept my compliments on your recovery."

Marc'antonio's frown had deepened. "You mean to tell me, Stephanu," he persisted, "that the Princess will have none of us?"

"She bade me go my ways, and not come near her; which was cold welcome for a man after a nine days' sweat. She added that if I or Marc'antonio came spying upon her or in any way interfering until she sent for us, she would appeal to her brother against us."

"Was the Prince present when she said this?"

"He was not. He was away hunting, she said, in the direction of Nonza; but in fact he must have gone reconnoitring, for he had left the camp all but

empty—no one at home but Andrea and Jacopo Galloni, whose turn it was with the cooking—these and the Princess. But the Prince has returned since then, for I heard his horn as I crossed the pass."

Stephanu, as we moved forward, kept alongside Marc'antonio's bridle, or as nearly alongside as the narrow track allowed. I, bringing up the rear, could not see the trouble in Marc'antonio's face, but I heard it in his voice as he put question after question. "The Princess was not a prisoner?" "No; nor under any constraint that Stephanu could detect. She had her gun; was in fact cleaning and oiling its lock very leisurably when he had walked into camp. He had found her there, seated on a rock, with Andrea and Jacopo Galloni at a little distance below preparing the meal and taking no notice of her. In fact they could not see her, because the rock overhung them."

"She must have been sitting there for sentry. At any rate there was no other guard set on the camp. Well, if so, she took it easily enough; but, catching sight of me, she stood up, put her finger to her lip and pointed over the ledge. Thereupon I peered over, but drew back my head before Andrea and Jacopo could spy me. So I stood before her, expecting to be praised for the despatch I had made on the road; but she praised me not. She motioned

me to follow her a little way out of earshot of the men below, to a patch of tall-growing junipers within which, when first we pitched camp, she had chosen to make her bower. Then she turned on me, and I saw that in some way I had vexed her, for her eyes were wrathful; and, said she, 'Why have you made this speed?' 'Because, O Princess, you have need of me,' I answered. 'I have no need of you,' she said. 'Where is Marc'antonio? And the young Englishman—is he yet alive?' 'O Princess,' I answered again, 'I did not go all the way to the old camp, but only so far that the man Priske could not mistake his road to it. Then, having put him in the way, I turned back and have travelled night and day. Of the young Englishman I can tell you nothing; but of Marc'antonio I can promise that he will be on the road and not far behind me.'"

"*Grazie*," muttered Marc'antonio; "but how could you be sure I had received the message?"

"Because the Princess had charged you to be at that post until released. Therefore I knew you would not have quitted it, if alive; and if you were dead—" Stephanu shrugged his shoulders. "I was in a hurry, you understand; and in a hurry a man must take a few risks."

"I am not saying you did ill," growled Marc'antonio, slightly mollified.

"The Princess said so, however. 'You are a fool, O Stephanu,' she told me; 'and as for needing you or Marc'antonio, on the contrary I forbid you both to join the camp for a while. Go back. If you meet Marc'antonio upon the road, give him this message for me.' 'But where, O Princess,' I asked, 'are we to await your pleasure?' 'Fare north, if you will, to Cape Corso,' she said, 'where that old mad Englishman boasts that he will reach my mother in her prison at Giraglia. He has gone thither alone, refusing help; and you may perhaps be useful to him.'"

Marc'antonio's growl grew deeper. "Was that all?" he asked.

"That was all."

"Then there is mischief here. The Prince, O Stephanu, did not without purpose send you out of the way. Now whatever he purposed he must have meant to do quickly, before we two should return to the camp——"

"He had mischief in his heart, I will swear," assented Stephanu, after a glance at me and another at Marc'antonio, who reassured him with a nod. "And that the Princess plainly guessed, by her manner at parting, when I set out with the man Priske. She was sorry enough then to say good-bye to me," he added, half-boastfully.

"Nevertheless," answered Marc'antonio with some sarcasm, "she appears to have neglected to confide to you what she feared."

Stephanu spread out his hands. "The Prince, and the reverend Father—who can tell what passes in their minds?"

"Not you, at any rate! Very well then:—the Princess was apprehensive. . . . Yet now, when the mischief (whatever it is) should either be done or on the point of doing, she will have none of our help. Clearly she knows more, yet will have none of our help. That is altogether puzzling to me. . . . And she sends us north. . . . Very well again; we will go north, but not far!"

He glanced back at me over his shoulder. I read his meaning—that he wished to plan his campaign privately with Stephanu—and, reining in my pony, I fell back out of earshot.

The pass above us stood perhaps three thousand feet above the shore and the high-road we had left; and the track, when it reached the steeper slopes, ran in long zigzagging terraces at the angles of which our ponies had sometimes to scramble up stairways cut in the living rock. As the sun sank a light mist gradually spread over the coast below us, the distant islands grew dim, and we rode suspended, as it were, over a bottomless vale and a sea

without horizon. Slowly, out of these ghostly wastes, the moon lifted herself in full circle, and her rays, crossing the cope of heaven, lit up a tall grey crag on the ridge above us, and the stem of a white-withered or blasted bush hanging from it—an isolated mass which (my companions told me) marked the summit of the ascent.

"The path leads round the base of it," said Stephanu. "We shall reach it in another twenty minutes."

"But will it not be guarded?" I asked.

He hunched his shoulders. "The Prince is no general. A hundred times our enemies might have destroyed us; but they prefer to leave us alone. It is more humiliating."

Marc'antonio rode forward deep in thought, his chin sunk upon his breast. At the summit, under the shadow of the great rock, he reined up, and, slewing himself about in his saddle, addressed Stephanu again.

"As I remember, there is a track below which branches off to the right, towards Nonza. It will take us wide of Olmeta and we can strike down into the lowland somewhere between the two. The Princess commands us to make for the north; so we shall be obeying her, and at the same time we can bivouac close enough to take stock at sunrise and,

maybe, learn some news of the camp—yet not so close that our horses can be heard, if by chance one should whinny."

"As to that you may rest easy," Stephanu assured him. "It is known that many of the farms below keep ponies in stable."

From the pass we looked straight down upon another sea, starlit and dimly discernible, and upon slopes and mountain spurs descending into dense woodland over which, along the bluffs of the ridge, the lights of a few lonely hill-farms twinkled. Stephanu found for us the track of which Marc'antonio had spoken, and although on this side of the range the shadows of the crags made an almost total darkness, our ponies took us down at a fair pace. After thirty, or it may be forty, minutes of this jolting and (to me) entirely haphazard progress, Marc'antonio again reined up, on the edge of a mountain stream which roared across our path so loudly as to drown his instructions. But at a sign from him Stephanu stepped back and took my bridle, and within a couple of minutes I felt that my pony's feet were treading good turf and, at a cry from my guide, ducked my head to avoid the boughs as we threaded our way down through an orchard of stalwart olives.

The slope grew gentler as we descended, and eased almost to a level on the verge of a high-road

running north and south under the glimmer of the moon—or rather of the pale light heralding the moon's advent. Marc'antonio looked about him and climbed heavily from his saddle. He had been riding since dawn.

I followed his example, though with difficulty—so stiff were my limbs; picketed my pony; and, having unstrapped the blanket from my saddle-bow, wrapped it about me and stretched myself on the thin turf to munch the crust Marc'antonio proffered me—for he carried our common viaticum.

"Never grudge a hard day's work when 'tis over," said he as he passed me the wine-skin. "Yonder side of the mountain breeds malaria even in winter, but on this side a man may sleep and rise fit for a bellyful."

He offered, very politely, to share his blanket with Stephanu, but Stephanu declined. Those two might share one loyalty and together take counsel for it, but between them as men there could be no liking nor acceptance of favours.

I lay listening for a while to the mutter of their voices as they talked there together under the olives; but not for long. The few words and exclamations that reached me carried no meaning. In truth I was worn out. Very soon the chatter of the stream, deep among the trees—the stream which we

had just now avoided—mixed itself up with their talk, and I slept.

Of a sudden I started up—sat up erect. I had been dreaming, and in my dream I had seen two figures pass along the road beyond the fringe of the trees. They had passed warily, yet hurriedly, across the patch of it now showing white between the olive-trunks, under the risen moon. Yet how could this have happened if I had dreamed it merely? For the moon, when I fell asleep, had not surmounted the ridge behind me, and that patch of road, now showing so white and clear, had been dim, if not quite invisible. Yet I could be sworn that two figures had passed up the road . . . two men . . .

Marc'antonio and Stephanu?—reconnoitring perhaps? I rubbed my eyes. No: Marc'antonio and Stephanu lay a few paces away, stretched in profound sleep under the moonlight drifting between the olive-boughs; and yonder, past the fringe of the orchard, shone the patch of white high-road. Two figures, half a minute since, had passed along it. I could be sworn to it, even while reason insisted that I had been dreaming.

I flung off my rug, and, stepping softly to the verge of the orchard's shadow, peered out upon the road. To my right—that is to say, northward—it

stretched away level and visibly deserted so far as the bend, little more than a gunshot distant, where it curved around the base of a low cliff and disappeared. A few paces on this side of the cliff glimmered the rail of a footbridge, and to this spot my ears traced the sound of running water which had been singing through my dreams—the same stream which had turned us aside to seek our bivouac. Not even yet could I believe that my two wayfarers had been phantoms merely. I had given them two minutes' start at least, and by this time they might easily have passed the bend. Threading my way swiftly between the boles of the olive-trees, I skirted the road to the edge of the stream and stood for a moment at pause before stepping out upon the footbridge and into the moonlight.

The water at my feet, scarcely seen through the dark ferns, ran swift and without noise as through a trough channelled in the living rock; but it brought its impetus from a cascade aloft somewhere in the darkness and humming with a low, continuous thunder as of a mill with a turning wheel. I lifted my head to the sound, and in that instant my ears caught a slight creak from the footbridge on my left. I turned, and stood rigid, at gaze. A woman was stepping across the bridge, there in the moonlight; a slight figure, cloaked and hooded and hurry-

ing fast; a woman, with a gun slung behind her and the barrel of it glimmering. It was the Princess.

I let her pass, and as she turned the bend of the road I stole out to the footbridge and across it in pursuit. I knew now that the two wayfarers had not been phantoms of my dreaming; that she was following, tracking them, and that I must track and follow her. Beyond the bend the road twisted over a low-lying spur of the mountain between outcrops of reddish-coloured rock, and then ran straight for almost three hundred yards, with olive-orchards on either hand; so that presently I could follow and hold her in sight, myself keeping well within the trees' line of shadow.

Twice she turned to look behind her, but rapidly and as if in no great apprehension of pursuit; or perhaps her own quest had made her reckless. At the end of this straight and almost level stretch the road rose steeply to wind over another foot-hill, and here she broke into a run. I pressed after her up the ascent, and from the knap of it, with a shock, found myself looking down at close hand upon a small bay of the sea with a white edge of foam curving away into a loom of shore above which a solitary light twinkled. The road, following the curve of the shore a few paces above the waves, lay bare in the moonlight, without cover to right or left, until, a mile away perhaps, it melted into the

grey of night. Along that distance my eyes sought and sought in vain for the figure that had been running scarcely two hundred yards ahead of me. The Princess had disappeared.

For a short while I stood utterly at fault; but, searching the bushes on my left, I was aware of a parting between them, overgrown indeed, yet plainly indicating a track; along which I had pushed but two-score of paces—perhaps less—before a light glimmered between the greenery and I stepped into an open clearing in full view of a cottage, the light of which fell obliquely across the turf through a warped or cracked window-shutter.

"Camillo!"—it was the Princess's voice, half imperious, half pleading; and from beyond the angle of the cottage wall came the noise of a latch shaken. "Open to me, Camillo, or by the Mother of Christ I will blow the door in! I have a gun, Camillo, and I swear to you!"

The challenge was not answered. Crouching almost on all fours, I sprang across the ray of light and gained the wall's shadow. There, as I drew breath, I heard the latch shaken again, more impatiently.

"Camillo!"

The bolt was drawn. Peering around the angle of the wall, I saw the light fall full on her face as the door opened, and she stepped into the cottage.

CHAPTER XXIII

ORDEAL AND CHOOSING

> Thou coward! Yet
> Art living? canst not, wilt not find the road
> To the great palace of magnificent death?—
> Though thousand ways lead to his thousand doors
> Which day and night are still unbarr'd for all.
> —Nat. Lee, *Œdipus.*

"No man"—I am quoting my father—"can be great, or even wise, or even, properly speaking, a man at all, until he has burnt his boats"; but I imagine that those who achieve wisdom and greatness burn their boats deliberately and not—as did I, next moment—upon a sudden, wild impulse.

My excuse is, the door was already closing behind the Princess. I knew she had tracked the Prince Camillo and his confessor, and that these two were within the cottage. I knew nothing of their business, save that it must be shameful, since she who had detected and would prevent it chose to hide her knowledge even from Marc'antonio and Stephanu. Then much rather (you may urge) would she choose to hide it from me. The objection is a sound one,

had I paused to consider it; but (fortunately or unfortunately, as you may determine) I did not. She had stepped into peril. The door was closing behind her: in another couple of seconds it would be bolted again. I sprang for it, hurled myself in through the entry, and there, pulling myself erect, stared about me.

Four faces returned my stare; four faces, and all dismayed as though a live bombshell had dropped through the doorway. To the priest, whom my impact had flung aside against the wall, I paid no attention. My eyes fastened themselves on the table at which, with a lantern and some scattered papers between them, sat two men—the Prince, and a grey-haired officer in the blue-and-white Genoese uniform. The Prince, who had pushed back his chair and confronted his sister with hands stretched out to cover or to gather up the papers on the table, slewed round upon me a face that, as it turned, slowly stiffened with terror. The Genoese officer rose with one hand resting on the table, while with the other he fumbled at a silver chain hanging across his breast, and as he shot a glance at the Prince I could almost see his lips forming the word "treachery." The Princess's consternation was of all the most absolute. "*The crown! Where is the crown?*"—as I broke in, her voice, half imperious,

half supplicatory, had panted out these words, while with outstretched hand and forefinger she pointed at the table. Her hand still pointed there, rigid as the rest of her body, as with dilated eyes she stared into mine.

"Yes, gentlemen," said I in the easiest tone I could manage, "the Princess asks you a question, which allow me to repeat. Where is the crown?"

"In the devil's name—" gasped the Prince.

The Genoese interrupted him. "Shut and bolt the door," he commanded the priest, sharply, with a nod.

"Master Domenico," said I, "if you move so much as a step, I will shoot you through the body."

The Genoese tugged at the chain on his breast and drew forth a whistle. "Signore," he said quietly and with another side glance at the Prince, "I do not know your name, but mine is Andrea Fornari, and I command the Genoese garrison at Nonza. Having some inherited knowledge of the Corsicans, and some fifty years' experience of my own, I do not walk into traps. A dozen men of mine stand within call here, at the back entrance, and my whistle will call me up another fifty. Bearing this in mind, you will state your business here as peaceably as possible."

"Nevertheless," said I, "since I have taken a

fancy—call it a whim, if you will—that the door remains at least unbolted . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It will help you nothing."

"I am an Englishman," said I.

"Indeed? Well, I have heard before now that it will explain anything and everything; but my poor understanding scarcely stretches it as yet to cover your presence here."

"Faith, sir," I answered, "to put the matter briefly, I am here because the Princess is here, whom I have followed—though without her knowledge—because I guessed her to be walking into peril."

"Excuse me. Without her knowledge, you say?" The Commandant turned to the Princess, who bowed her head but continued to gaze at me from under her lowered brows.

"Absolutely, sir."

"And without knowledge of her errand? Again excuse me, but does it not occur to you that you may be intruding at this moment upon a family affair?"

Here the Prince broke in with a scornful laugh. For a minute or so his brow had been clearing, but, though he sneered, he could not as yet meet his sister's eye. I noted this as his laugh drew my gaze upon him, and it seemed that my contempt gave me

a sudden clear insight; for I found myself answering the Commandant very deliberately:

"The Princess, sir, until a moment ago, perhaps knew not whether I was alive or dead, and certainly knew not that I was within a hundred miles of this place. Had she known it, she would as certainly not have confided her errand to me, mixed up as it is with her brother's shame. She would, I dare rather wager, have taken great pains to hide it from me. And yet I will not pretend that I am quite ignorant of it, as neither will I allow—family affair though it be—that I have no interest in it, seeing that it concerns the crown of Corsica."

The Commandant glanced at the Prince, then at the priest, who stood passive, listening, with his back to the wall, his loose-lidded eyes studying me from the lantern's penumbra.

"What possible interest—" began the Commandant.

"By the crown of Corsica," I interrupted, "I mean the material crown of the late King Theodore, at this moment concealed (if I mistake not) somewhere in this cottage. In it I may claim a certain interest, seeing that I brought it from England to this island, and that the Prince Camillo here—whose father gave it to me—is trading it to you by fraud. Yes, *messere*, he may claim that it belongs

to him by right; but he obtained it from me by fraud, as neither he nor his sister can deny. This perhaps might pass, but when he—he a son of Corsica—goes on to sell it to Genoa, I reassert my claim."

Again the Commandant shrugged his shoulders. It consoled me to note that his glance at the Prince was by no means an admiring one.

"I am a soldier," he said curtly. "I do not deal in sentiment; nor is it my business, when a bargain comes to me—a bargain in which I can serve my country—to inquire into how's and why's."

"I grant that, sir," said I. "It is your business, now that the crown—with what small profit may go with it—lies in your grasp, to grasp it for Genoa. But as a soldier and a brave man, you understand that now you must grasp it by force. God knows in what hope, if in any, the Princess here tracked out your plot; but at least she can compel you—I can compel you—we two, weak as we are, can compel you—to use force. The honour of a race—and that a royal one—shall at least not pass to you on the mere signature of that coward sitting there." I swung round upon the Prince. "You may give up trying to hide those papers, sir, since every one in this room knows what compact you were in the act of signing."

The Princess stepped forward. "All this," she

said to me in a low, hard voice, "I could have done without help of you." Her tone promised that she would never forgive, but she looked only at her brother. "Camillo," she said, standing before him, "this Englishman has said only what I came to say. It is not my fault that he is here and has guessed. When I was sure, I hid my knowledge even from Marc'antonio and Stephanu; and he—he shall die for having overheard. The Genoese will see to that, and the Commandant, as he is a gentleman, will write in his report that he took the crown from us, having caught us at unawares. . . . I cannot shoot you, my brother. Even you would not ask this of me—of me that have served you, and that serve you now in the end. . . . See, I make no reproaches. . . . We were badly brought up, we two, and when you were young and helpless, vile men took hold on you and taught you to be capable of—of this thing. But we are Colonne, we two, and can end as Colonne." She dipped a hand within the bosom of her bodice and drew out a phial. "Dear, I will drink after you. It will not be hard; no, believe me, it will not be so very hard—a moment, a pang perhaps, and everything will yet be saved. O brother, what is a pang, a moment, that you can weigh it against a lifetime of dishonour!"

The Prince sprang up cursing.

"Dishonour? And who are you that talk to me of dishonour?—you that come straying here out of the night with your *cicisbeo* at your heels? You, with the dew on you and your dress bedraggled, come straight from companioning in the woods and prate to me of shame—of the blood of the Colonne!" He smote a hand on the table and spat forth a string of vile names upon her, mixed with curses; abominable words before which she drew back cowering, yet less (I think) from the lash of them than from shock and horror of his incredible baseness. Passion twisted his mouth, his tongue stammered with the gush of his abuse; but he was lying, and knew that he was lying, for his eyes would meet neither hers nor mine. Only after drawing breath did he for a moment look straight at her, and then it was to demand: "And who, pray, has driven me to this? What has made Corsica so bitter to me that in weariness I am here to resign it? You, my sister—you, and what is known of you. . . . Why can I do nothing with the patriots? Why were there no recruits? Why, when I negotiated, did the Paolists listen as to a child and smile politely and show me their doors? Again, because of you, O my sister! —because there is not a household in Corsica but has heard whisperings of you, and of Brussels, and of the house in Brussels where you were sought and

found. Blood of the Colonne!—and now the blood of the Colonne takes an English lover to warm it! Blood of——"

With one hand I caught him by the throat, with the other by the girdle, and flung him clean across the table into the corner, oversetting the lantern, but not extinguishing the light, for the Commandant caught it up deftly. As he set it back on the table I heard him grunt, and—it seemed to me—with approval.

"I will allow no shooting, sir," said he, quickly, yet with easy authority, noting my hand go down to my gun-stock.

"You misunderstand me," I answered, and indeed I was but shifting its balance on my bandolier, which had slipped awry in the struggle. "There are reasons why I cannot kill this man. But you will give me leave to answer just two of his slanders upon this lady. It is false that I came here to-night by her invitation or in her company, as it is God's truth that for many months until we met in this room and in your presence she has not set eyes on me. She could not have known even that I lived since the hour when her brother there—yes, Princess, your brother there—left me broken and maimed at the far end of the island. For the rest he utters slanders to which I have no clue save that I know them

to be slanders. But at a venture, if you would know how they grew and who nurtured them, I think the priest yonder can tell you."

The Commandant waved a hand politely. "You have spoken well, sir. Believe me, on this point no more is necessary. I have no doubt—there can be no doubt—that the Prince lies under a misapprehension. Nevertheless, there are circumstances which bind me to oblige him"—he paused—"and you will admit that you have placed the lady—thoughtlessly no doubt—in a delicate situation."

"Well and good, sir," I replied. "If, in your opinion as a man of honour, the error demands a victim, by all means call in your soldiers and settle me. I stipulate only that you escort the lady back to her people with honour under a flag of truce; and I protest only, as she has protested, that this traitor has no warrant to sell you his country's rights."

The Prince had picked himself up, and stood sulkily, still in his corner. I suppose that he was going to answer this denunciation, when the priest's voice broke in, smooth and unctuous.

"Pardon me, *messeri*, but there occurs to me a more excellent way. This Englishman has brought dishonour on one of the Colonne: therefore it is most necessary that he should die. But before dying let him make the only reparation—and marry her."

I turned on him, staring: and in the flicker of his eyes as he lifted them for one instant towards his master, I read the whole devilish cunning of the plot. They might securely let her go, as an Englishman's widow. The fact had merely to be proclaimed and the islanders would have none of her. I am glad to remember that—my brain keeping clear, albeit my pulse, already fast enough, leapt hotly and quickened its speed—I had presence of mind to admire the suggestion coolly, impersonally, and quite as though it affected me no jot.

The Commandant bent his brows. Behind them —as it seemed to me—I could read his thought working.

"If you, sir, have no objection," he said slowly, looking up and addressing me with grave politeness, "I see much to be said for the reverend father's proposal."

He turned to the Prince, who—cur that he was—directed his spiteful glee upon his sister.

"It appears, O Camilla, that in our race to save each other's honour I am to be winner. Nay, you may wear your approaching widowhood with dignity, and boast in time to come that your husband once bore the crown of Corsica."

"Prince Camillo," said the Commandant quietly, "I am here to-night in the strict service of my Re-

public, to do my best for her: but I warn you that if you a second time address your sister in that tone I shall reserve the right to remember it later as a plain Genoese gentleman. Sir," he faced about and addressed me again, "am I to understand that you accept?"

I looked at the Princess. She met my look proudly, with eyes set in a face pale as death. I could not for the life of me read whether they forbade me or implored. They seemed to forbid, protest . . . and yet (the bliss of it!) for one half-instant they had also seemed to implore. Thank God at least they did not scorn!

"Princess," I said, "these men propose to do me an infinite honour—an honour far above my deserving—and to kill me while my heart yet beats with the pride of it. Yet say to me now if I must renounce it, and I will die bearing you no grudge. Take thought, not of me, but of yourself only, and sign to me if I must renounce."

Still she eyed me, pale and unblinking. Her bosom panted, and for a moment she half-raised her hand; but dropped it again.

"I think, sir," said I, facing around on the Commandant, "I think by this time the day must be breaking—if you will kindly open the shutters. Also you would oblige me further—set it down to

an Englishman's whim—by forming up your men outside, and we will have a soldier's wedding."

"Willingly, cavalier." The Commandant stepped to the shutter and unbarred it, letting in daylight with the cool morning breeze—a greenish-grey daylight, falling across the glade without as softly as ever through cathedral aisles, and a breeze that was wine to the taste as it breathed through the exhausted air of the cottage—a sacramental dawn, and somewhere deep in the arcades of the tree-boles a solitary bird singing!

The Commandant leaned forth and blew his whistle. The bird's song ceased abruptly and was followed by the tramp of men. My brain worked so clearly, I could almost count their footsteps. I saw them, across the Commandant's shoulder, as they filed past the corner of the window and, having formed into platoon, grounded arms, the butts of their muskets thudding softly on the turf—a score of men in blue-and-white uniforms, spick and span in the clear morning light.

I counted them and drew a long breath.

"Master priest," said I, and held out my hand to the Princess, "in your Church, I believe, matrimony is a sacrament. If you are ready, I am ready."

His loose lip twitched as he stepped forward.

. . . When he paused in his muttering I lifted the Princess's cold hand and drew a seal from my pocket—a heavy seal with a ring attached, which I fitted on her finger; and so I held her hand, letting drop on it by degrees the weight of the heavy seal.

From the first she had offered no resistance, made no protest. I pressed the seal into the palm of her hand, not telling her that it was her own father's great seal of Corsica. But I folded her fingers back on it, the one yet encircled by the ring, and said I, "It is the best I can give"; and a little later, "It is all I brought in my pockets but this handkerchief. Take that, too; lead me out; and bandage my eyes, my wife."

She took my arm obediently and we stepped out by the doorway, bridegroom and bride, in face of the soldiery. A sergeant saluted and came forward for the Commandant's orders.

"A moment, sir," said I, and, touching the Commandant's arm, I nodded towards the bole of a stout pine-tree across the clearing. "Will that distance suit you?"

He nodded in reply, and as I swung on my heel touched my arm in his turn.

"You will do me the honour, sir, to shake hands?"

"Most willingly, sir." I shook hands with him,

casting, as I did so, a glance over my shoulder at the Prince and Father Domenico, who hung back in the doorway—two men afraid. "Come," said I to the Princess, and, as she seemed to hesitate, "Come, my wife," I commanded, and walked to the pine-tree, she following. I held out the handkerchief. She took it, still obediently, and as she took it I clasped her hand and lifted it to my lips.

"Nay," said I, challenging, "what was it you told your brother? A moment—a pang—what are they to weigh against a lifetime of dishonour?"

I saw her blench: yet even while she bandaged me at my bidding, I did not arrive at understanding the folly—the cruel folly of that speech. Nay, even when, having bandaged me, she stepped away and left me, I considered not nor surmised what second meaning might be read in it.

Shall I confess the truth? I was too consciously playing a part and making a handsome exit. After all, had I not some little excuse? . . . Here was I, young, lusty, healthful, with a man's career before me, and across it, trenched at my feet, the grave. A saying of Billy Priske's comes into my mind—a word spoken, years after, upon a poor fisherman of Constantine parish whose widow, as by will directed, spent half his savings on a tombstone of carved granite. "A man," said Billy, "must cut a dash

once in his lifetime, though the chance don't come till he's dead" . . . Looking back across these years, I can smile at the boy I was and forgive his poor brave flourish. But his speech was thoughtless: the woman (ah! but he knows her better now) was withdrawn with its wound in her heart: and between them Death was stepping forward to make the misunderstanding final.

I remember setting my shoulder-blades firmly against the bole of the tree. A kind of indignation sustained me—scorn to be cut off thus, scorn especially for the two cowards by the doorway. They were talking with the Commandant. Their voices sounded across the interval between me and the firing party. Why were they wasting time? . . .

I could not distinguish their words, save that twice I heard the Prince curse viciously. The hound (I told myself, shutting my teeth) might have restrained his tongue for a few moments—a few moments only.

The voices ceased. In a long pause I heard the insects humming in the grasses at my feet. Would the moment never come?

It came at last. A flash of light winked above the edge of my bandage and close upon it broke the roar and rattle of the volley . . . Death? I put out my hands and groped for it. Where was Death?

Nay, perhaps this *was* Death? If so, what fools were men to fear it! The hum of the insects had given place to silence—absolute silence. If bullet had touched me, I had felt no pang at all. I was standing, yes, surely I was standing . . . Slowly it broke on me that I was unhurt, that they had fired wide, prolonging their sport with me; and I tore away the bandage, crying out upon them to finish their cruelty.

At a little distance sat the Princess watching me, her gun across her knees. Beyond her and beyond the cottage, by the edge of the wood the firing party had fallen into rank and were marching off among the pine-stems, the Prince and Father Domenico with them. I stared stupidly after the disappearing uniforms, and put out a hand as if to brush away the smoke which yet floated across the clearing. The Commandant, turning to follow his men, at the same moment lifted his hand in salute. So he, too, passed out of sight.

I turned to the Princess: and she arose slowly and came to me.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WOOING OF PRINCESS CAMILLA

Take heed of loving me,
At least remember I forbade it thee;
If thou love me, take heed of loving me.
—DONNE, *The Prohibition.*

"You have conquered."

She had halted, a pace or two from me, with downcast eyes. She said it very slowly, and I stared at her and answered with an unmeaning laugh.

"Forgive me, Princess. I—I fancy my poor wits have been shaken and need a little time to recover. At any rate, I do not understand you."

"You have conquered," she repeated in a low voice that dragged upon the words. Then, after a pause. —"You remember, once, promising me that at the last I should come and place my neck under your foot. . . ." She glanced up at me and dropped her eyes again. "Yes, I see that you remember. *Eccù* . . . I am here."

"I remember, Princess: but even yet I do not understand. Why, and for what, should you beseech me?"

"In the first place for death. I am your wife. . . ." She broke off with a shiver. "There is something in the name, *messere*—is there not?—that should move you to kindness, as a sportsman takes his game not unkindly to break its neck. That is all I ask of you——"

"Princess!"

She lifted a hand. "—except that you will let me say what I have to say. You shall think hard thoughts of me, and I will make them harder; but for your own sake you shall put away vile ones—if you can."

I stared at her stupidly, dizzied a little with the words *I am your wife* humming in my brain. Or say that I am naturally not quick-witted, and I will plead that for once my dulness did me no discredit.

At all events it saved me for the moment: for while I stared at her, utterly at a loss, a crackle of twigs warned us and we turned together as, by the pathway leading from the high-road, the bushes parted and the face of Marc'antonio peered through upon the clearing.

"Salutation, O Princess!" said he gravely, and stepped out of cover attended by Stephanu, who likewise saluted.

The Princess drew herself up imperiously. "I thought, O Stephanu, that I had made plain my

orders, that you two were neither to follow nor to watch me?"

"Nevertheless," Marc'antonio made answer, "when one misses a comrade and hears, at a little distance, the firing of a volley—not to mention that some one has been burning gunpowder hereabouts," he wound up, sniffing the air with an expression that absurdly reminded me of our Vicar, at home, tasting wine.

"I warn you, O Marc'antonio," said the Princess, "to be wise and ask no more questions."

"I have asked none, O Princess," he answered again still very gravely, and after a glance at me turned to Stephanu. "But it runs in my head, comrade, that the time has come to consider other things than wisdom."

"For example?" I challenged him sharply.

"For example, cavalier, that I cannot reconcile this smell with any Corsican gunpowder."

"And you are right," said I. "Nay, Princess, you have sworn not long since to obey me, and I choose that they shall know. That salvo, sirs, was fired, five minutes ago, by the Genoese."

"A salvo did you say, cavalier?"

"For our wedding, Marc'antonio." I took the Princess's hand—which neither yielded nor resisted—and, lifting it a little way, released it to fall again

limply. So for a while there was silence between us four.

"Marc'antonio," said I, "and you, Stephanu—it is I now who speak for the Princess and decide for her: and I decide that you, who have served her faithfully, deserve to be told all the truth. It is truth, then, that we are married. The priest who married us was Fra Domenico, and with assent of his master the Prince Camillo. I can give you, moreover, the name of the chief witness: he is a certain Signor or General Andrea Fornari, and commands the Genoese garrison in Nonza."

"Princess!" Marc'antonio implored her.

"It is true," said she. "This gentleman has done me much honour, having heard what my brother chose to say."

"But I do not understand—" The honest fellow cast a wild look around the clearing. "Ah, yes—the volley! They have taken the Prince, and shot him. . . . But his body—they would not take his body—and you standing here and allowing it——"

"My friends," I interrupted, "they have certainly taken his body, and his soul too, for that matter; and I doubt if you can overtake either on this side of Nonza. But with him you will find the crown of Corsica and the priest who helped him to sell it. I tell you this, who are clansmen of the Colonne:

and your mistress, who discovered the plot and was here to hinder it, will confirm me."

Their eyes questioned her; not for long. In the droop of her bowed head was confirmation enough.

"And therefore," I went on, "you two can have no better business than to help me convey the Princess northward and bring her to her mother, whom in this futile following after a wretched boy, you have all so strangely forgotten. By God!" said I, "there is but one man in Corsica who has hunted, this while, on a true scent and held to it, and he is an Englishman, solitary and faithful at this moment upon Cape Corso!"

"Your pardon, cavalier," answered Marc'antonio after a slow pause. "What you say is just, in part, and I am not denying it. But so we saw not our duty, since the Queen Emilia bade us follow her son. With him we have hunted (as you tell us) too long and upon a false scent. Be it so: but, since this has befallen, we must follow on the chase a little further. For you, you have now the right to protect our well-beloved—not only to the end of Cape Corso, but to the end of the world. But for us, who are two men used to obey, the Princess your wife must suffer us to disobey her now for the first time. The road to the Cape, avoiding Nonza, is rough and steep and must be travelled afoot; yet I think you twain can

accomplish it. At the Cape, if God will, we will meet you and stand again at your service; but we travel by another road—the road which does not avoid Nonza."

He glanced at Stephanu, who nodded.

"Farewell then, O Princess; and if this be the end of our service, forgive what in the past has been done amiss. Farewell, O cavalier, and be happy to protect her in perils wherein we were powerless."

The Princess stretched out both hands.

"Nay, mistress," said Marc'antonio with another glance at Stephanu; "but first cross them, that there be no telling the right from the left: for we are jealous men."

She crossed them obediently, and the two took each a hand and kissed it.

Now all this while I could see that she was struggling for speech, and as they released her hands she found it.

"But wherefore must you go by Nonza, O Marc'antonio? And how many will you take with you?"

Marc'antonio put the question aside. "We go alone, Princess. You may call it a reconnaissance, on which the fewer taken the better."

"You will not kill him!—Nay, then, O Marc'antonio, at least—at least you will not hurt him!"

"We hope, Princess, that there will be no need,"

he answered seriously, and, saluting once more, turned on his heel. Stephanu also saluted and turned, and the pair, falling into step, went from us across the clearing.

I watched them till their forms disappeared in the undergrowth, and turned to my bride.

"And now, Princess, I believe you have something to say to me. Shall it be here? I will not suggest the cottage, which is overfull maybe of unpleasant reminders; but here is a tree-trunk, if you will be seated."

"That shall be as my lord chooses."

I laughed. "Your lord chooses, then, that you take a seat. It seems (I take your word for it) that there must be hard thoughts between us. Well, a straight quarrel is soonest ended, they say: let us have them out and get them over."

"Ah, you hurt! Is it necessary that you hurt so?" Her eyes no less than her voice sobered me at once, shuddering together as though my laugh had driven home a sword and it grated on the bone. I remembered that she always winced at laughter, but this evident anguish puzzled me.

"God knows," said I, "how I am hurting you. But pardon me; speak what you have to speak; and I will be patient while I learn."

"'A lifetime of dishonour' you said, and yet you

laugh. . . . A lifetime of dishonour, and you were blithe to be shot and escape it; yet now you laugh. Ah, I cannot understand!"

"Princess!" I protested, although not even now did I grasp what meaning she had misread into my words.

"But you said rightly. It is a lifetime of dishonour you have suffered them to put on you: and I—I have taken more than life from you, cavalier—yet I cannot grieve it while you laugh. O sir, do not take from me my last help, which is to honour you!"

"Listen to me, Princess," said I, stepping close and standing over her. "What do you suppose that I meant by using those words?—your own words, remember."

"That is better. It will help us both if we are frank—only do not treat me as a child. You heard what my brother said. Yes, and doubtless you have heard other things to my shame. . . . Answer me."

"If your brother chose to utter slanders——"

"Yes, yes; it was easy to catch him by the throat. That is how one man treats another who calls a woman vile in her presence. It does not mean that he disbelieves, and therefore is worthless: but a gallant man will act so, almost without a second thought, and because it is *dans les formes.*" She paused. "I learned that phrase in Brussels, cavalier."

I made no answer.

—"In Brussels, cavalier," she repeated, "where it was often in the mouths of very vile persons. You have heard, perhaps, that we—that my brother and I—lived our childhood in Brussels?"

I bent my head, without answering, but still she persisted. "I was brought to Corsica from Brussels, cavalier. Marc'antonio and Stephanu fetched us thence, being guided by that priest who is now my brother's confessor."

"I have been told so, Princess. Marc'antonio told me."

"Did he also tell you where he found me?"

"No, Princess."

"Did he tell you that, being fetched hither, I was offered by my brother in marriage to a young Count Odo of the Rocca Serra, and that the poor boy slew himself with his own gun?"

I stuffed my hands deep in my pockets, and said I, standing over her, "All this has been told me, Princess, though not the precise reason for it: and since you desire me to be frank I will tell you that I have given some thought to that dead lad—that rival of mine (if you will permit the word) whom I never knew. The mystery of his death is a mystery to me still: but in all my blind guesses this somehow remained clear to me, that he had loved you, Prin-

cess: and this (again I ask your leave to say it), because I could understand it so well, forbade me to think unkindly of him."

"He loved his honour better, sir." Her face had flushed darkly.

"I am sorry, then, if I must suffer by comparison."

"No, no," she protested. "Oh, why will you twist my words and force me to seem ungrateful? He died rather than have me to wife: you took me on the terms that within a few minutes you must die. For both of you the remedy was at hand, only you chose to save me before taking it. On my knees, sir, I could thank you for that. The crueller were they that, when you stood up claiming your right to die, they broke the bargain and cheated you."

"Princess," I said after musing a moment, "if my surviving seemed to you so pitiable, there was another way." I pointed to her musket.

"Yes, cavalier, and I will confess to you that when, having fired wide, they turned to go and the cheat was evident, twice before you pulled the bandage away I had lifted my gun. But I could not fire it, cavalier. To make me your executioner! . . . and while you thought so vilely of me. . . ."

"Faith," said I grimly, "it was asking too much, even for a Genoese! Yet again I think you overrate their little trick, since after all"—I touched my own

gunstock—" there remains a third way—the way chosen by young Odo of Rocca Serra."

She put out a hand. " Sir, that way you need not take—if you will be patient and hear me! "

" Lady," said I, " you may hastily despise me, but I am neither going to take that way, nor to be patient, nor to hear you. But I am, as you invited me, going to be very frank and confess to you, risking your contempt, that I am extremely thankful the Genoese did not shoot me, just now. Indeed, I do not remember in all my life to have felt so glad, as I feel just now, to be alive. Give me your gun, please."

" I do not understand."

" No, you do not understand. . . . Your gun, please . . . nay, you can lay it on the turf between us: the phial, too, that you offered your brother. Thank you. And now, my wife, let us talk of your country and mine—two islands which appear to differ more than I had guessed. In Corsica it would seem that, let a vile thing be spoken against a woman, it suffices. Belief in it does not count: it suffices that a shadow has touched her, and rather than share that shadow, men will kill themselves—so tender a plant is their honour. Now in England, O Princess, men are perhaps even more irrational. They, no more than your Corsicans, listen to the evidence and ask themselves, ' Is this good evidence or bad? Do I

believe it or disbelieve?' They begin farther back, Princess—shall I tell you how? They look in the face of their beloved and they say, 'Slander this only as you dare; for here my belief is fixed beforehand.'"

"And therefore, O Princess," I went on after a pause in which we eyed one another slowly, "therefore, I disbelieve any slander concerning you; not merely because your brother's confessor was its author—though this to any rational man should be enough—but because I have looked in your face. Therefore also I—I, your husband—forbid you to speak what would dishonour us both."

"But, cavalier—if—if it were true?"

"True?"—I let out a harsh laugh. "Take up that phial. Hold it in your hand—so. Now look me in the face and drink—if you dare! Look me in the face, read how I trust you, and so, if you can say the lie to me, say it—and drink!"

She lifted the phial steadily, almost to her lips, keeping her eyes on mine—but of a sudden faltered and let it fall upon the turf; where I, whose heart had all but stood still, crushed my heel upon it savagely.

"I cannot. You have conquered," she gasped.

"Conquered?" I swore a bitter oath. "O Princess, think you *this* is the way I promised to conquer

you? Take up your gun again and follow me. . . . Eh? You do not ask where I lead?"

"It is enough that I follow you, my husband," she said, slowly, humbly.

"It is something, indeed: but before God it is not enough, not half enough. I see now that 'enough' may never come: almost I doubt if I, who swore to you it should come, and since have desired it madly, desire it any longer; and until it comes you are still the winner. 'Enough' shall be said, Princess—for my price rises—not when (as I promised) you come to me without choosing to be loved or hated, only beseeching your master, but when you shall come to me having made your choice. . . . But so far, so good," said I cheerfully, changing my tone. "You do not ask where I lead. I am leading you, if I can, to Cape Corso, to my father; and by his means, if they serve, to your mother."

"I thank you, cavalier," she said, still in her restrained voice. "You are a good man; and for that reason I am sorry you will not listen to me—and understand."

"The mountains are before us," said I, shouldering my gun. "Listen, Princess: let us be good comrades, us two. Let us forget what lies at the end of the journey—the convent for you, maybe, and for me at least the parting. My life has been spared

to-day and I tell you frankly, I am glad of the respite. For you, the mountains hold no slanders, and still less shall hold any evil. Put your hand in mine on the compact, and we will both step it bravely: forget that you were ever a Princess or I a promised king of this Corsica. O beloved, travel this land which can never be yours or mine, and let it be ours only for a while as we journey."

I turned and led the way up the path between the bushes, not staying to part them for her: and she followed my stride almost at a run. On the bare mountain spur above the high-road she overtook and fell into pace with me; and so, skirting Nonza, we breasted the long slope of the range.

CHAPTER XXV

MY WEDDING DAY

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see whether the vine hath budded and the tender grape appear.
—*The Song of Songs.*

Ahead of us, high on our right, rose the mountain ridges, scarp upon scarp, to the snowy peak of Monte Stella; low on our left lay Nonza, and beyond it a sea blue as a sapphire, scarcely rippled, void of life save for one white sail far away on the south-west horizon—not the *Gauntlet*: for, distant though she was, I could make out the shape of her canvas, and it was square-cut.

Nonza itself lay in the shadow of the shore with the early light shimmering upon its citadel and upper works—a fortress to all appearance asleep: but the Genoese pickets would be awake and guarding the northward road for at least a league beyond, and to avoid them we must cross the high mountain spurs, using where we could their patches of forest and our best speed where these left the ridges bare.

The way was hard—harder by far than I had

deemed possible—and kept us too busy for talk. Our silence was not otherwise constrained at all. Passion fell away from us as we climbed; fell away with its strife, its confusion, its distempered memories of the night now past, and was left with the vapours of the coast where the malaria brooded. Through the upper, clearer atmosphere we walked as gods on the roof of the world, saw with clear eyes and knew with mind and spirit untroubled by self-sickness. We were silent, having fallen into an accord which made speech unnecessary. Difficult as the road soon became, and, while unknown to both of us, more difficult to me because of my inexperience, we chose without hesitating, almost without consulting, each moment bringing decision, and with decision, its own help. Now it was I who steadied her leap across a chasm; now came her turn to underprop my foothold till I reached a ledge whence I could reach down a hand and drag her up to me. As a rule I may call myself a blundering climber, my build being too heavy; but I made no mistake that day. Once only (as I remember) she spoke to me in the course of a three hours' scramble, and then as a comrade, in quiet approval of my mountaineering. We had come to a crag over which—with no word said—I had lowered her by help of my bandolier. She had waited at the foot while I followed her down without assistance,

traversing on the way an outward-sloping ledge of smooth rock which overhung a precipice and a sheer fall of at least three hundred feet. The ledge had nowhere a notch in it to grip the boot-sole, and was moreover slippery with the green ooze of a mountain spring. It has haunted my dreams since then; I would not essay it again for my weight in money; but I crossed it that day, so to speak, with my hands in my pockets.

The most curious (you might call it the most uncanny) part of the whole adventure, was that from time to time we came out of these breathless scrambles plump upon a patch of cultivated ground and a hill-farm with its steading; the explanation being that these farms stand each at the head of its own ravine, and, inaccessible one to another, have communication with the world only by the tracks, which lead down their ravines. Here, three thousand feet and more above the sea—upon which we looked down between cliff and woodland as through a funnel, and upon the roofs and whitewashed walls of fishing-villages on the edge of the blue—lived slow, sedate folks, who called their dogs off us and stared upon us as portents and gave us goat's-milk and bread, refusing the coins we proffered. The inhabitants of this cape (I have since learned) are a race apart in Corsica; slow, peaceable, without politics and almost

(as we should say) without patriotism. We came to them as gods from the heights, and they received and sped us as gods. They were too slow of speech to question us, or even to express their astonishment.

There was one farm with a stream plunging past it, and, by the house-wall, a locked mill-wheel (God knows what it had ever ground), and by the door below it a woman seated on a flight of steps with her bosom half-covered and a sucking-child laid asleep across her knees. She blinked in the sunshine as we came across the yard to her, and said she:—

"Salutation, O strangers, and pardon that I cannot rise: but the little one is sick of a fever and I fear to stir him, for he makes as if he would sleep. Nor is there any one else to entertain you, since my husband has gone down to the *marina* to fetch the wise woman who lives there."

The Princess stepped close and stood over her. "O *paesana*," said she, "do you and your man live here alone, so far up the mountain?"

"There is the *bambino*," said the mother simply. "He is my first—and a boy, by the gift of the Holy Virgin. Already he takes notice, and soon he will be learning to talk: but since we both talk to him and about him, you may say that already there are three of us, and anon the good Lord may send us others. It is hard work, O *bella donna*, on such a

farm as ours, and doubly hard on my husband now for these months that I have been able to help him but little. But with a good man and his child—if God spare the child—I shall want no happiness."

"Give me the child," said the Princess, taking a seat on the stone slab beside her. "He shall not hurt with me while you fetch us a draught of milk."

The woman stared at her and at me, fearfully at first, then with a strange look in her eyes, between awe and disbelief and a growing hope.

"Even when you came," she said hoarsely after a while, "I was praying for an angel to help my child. . . . O blind, O hard of faith that I am! And when I lifted my eyes and saw you, I bethought me not that none walk this mountain by the path you have come, nor has this land any like you twain for beauty and stature. . . . O lady—whether from heaven or earth—you will not take my child but to cure it? He is my only one."

"Give him to me."

The woman laid her child in the Princess's arms and ran into the house, throwing one look of terror back at us from the doorstep. The Princess sat motionless, gazing down on the closed lids, frowning, deep in thoughts I could not follow.

"You will not," said I, "leave this good foolish soul in her error?"

"I have heard," she answered quietly, without lifting her eyes, "that a royal touch has virtue to heal sometimes—and there was a time when you claimed to be King of Corsica. Nay, forgive me," she took herself up quickly, "there is bitterness yet left in me, but that speech shall be the last of it. . . . O husband, O my friend, I was thinking that this child will grow into a man: and of what his mother said, that there is such a thing as a good man: and I am trying to believe her. . . . *Eccù*! he sleeps, poor mite! Listen to his breathing."

The farm-wife came out with a full bowl of milk. Her hands shook and spilled some as she handed it to me, so eager were they to hold her infant again. Taking it and feeling the damp sweat as she passed a hand over its brow, she broke forth into blessings.

We told her of her mistake: but I doubt if she heard. "I have dwelt here these three years," she persisted, "and none ever walked the mountain by the path you have come." She watched us as I held the bowl for the Princess to drink, and asked quaintly, "But is there no marrying in heaven? I have thought upon that many times and always it puzzles me."

We said farewell to her and took her blessings with us as she watched us across the head of the ravine. Then followed another half-hour of silence

and sharp climbing: but the worst was over, and by and by the range tailed off into a chain of lessening hills over which in the purple distance rose a solitary sharp cone with a ruinous castle upon it, which (said the Princess) was Seneca's Tower at the head of the Vale of Luri.

We were now beyond the danger of the Genoese, and therefore turned aside to the left and descended the slopes to the high-road, along which we made good speed until, having passed the tower and the mouth of the gorge which leads up to it from the westward, we came, almost at nightfall, within sight of Pino by the sea.

Here I proposed that I should go forward to the village and find a night's lodging for her, pointing out that, the night being warm and dry, I could make my couch comfortably enough in one of the citron orchards that here lined the road on the landward side. To this at first she assented—it seemed to me, even eagerly. But I had scarcely taken forty paces up the road before I heard her voice calling me back, and back I went obediently.

"O husband," she said, "the dusk has fallen, and now in the dusk I can say a word I have been longing all day to be free of. Nay"—she put out a hand—"you must not forbid me: you must not even delay me now."

"What is it, that I should forbid you?"

"It is—about Brussels."

I dropped my hand impatiently and was turning away, but she touched my arm and the touch pleaded with me to face her.

"I have a right. . . . Yes, it was good of you to refuse it; but you cannot go on refusing, because—see you—your goodness makes my right the stronger. This morning I could have told you, but you refused me. All this day I have known that refusal unjust."

"All this day? Then—pardon, Princess—but why should I hear you now, at this moment?"

"The daylight is past," she said simply. "You can listen now and not see my face."

On the hedge of the ditch beside the high-road lay a rough fragment of granite, a stone cracked and discarded, once the base of an olive-mill. She found a seat upon it and motioned to me to come close, and I stood close, staring down on her while she stared down at her feet, grey with dust almost as the road itself.

"We were children, Camillo and I," she said at length, "in keep of an ill woman we called Maman Trebuchet, and in a house near the entrance of a court leading off the Rue de la Madeleine and close beside the market. How we had come there we never inquired. . . . I suppose all children take

such things as they find them. The house was of five stories, all let out in tenements, and we inhabited two rooms on the fourth floor to the left as you went up the staircase. . . . Some of the men quarrelled with their wives and beat them. There was always a noise of quarrelling somewhere in the house: but outside before the front door the men who were not beating their women would sit for hours together and smoke and spit and tell one another stories against the Church and against women. The pavement where they sat and the street before it was strewn always with rotting odds and ends of vegetables, for almost every one in that quarter earned his living by the Market, and Maman Trebuchet among the rest. She divided her time between walking the streets with a basket and drinking the profits away in the cabarets, and in the intervals she cursed and beat us. We lived for the most part on the refuse she brought home at night—on so much of her stock as had found no purchaser, and we played about the gutters and alleys of the Market. So far as I remember we were neither very happy nor yet very miserable. We knew that we were brother and sister, and that Maman Trebuchet was not our real mother. Beyond this we were not inquisitive, but took life as we found it.

"Nevertheless, I know now that we were not alto-

gether lost, but that eyes in Brussels were watching us—though how far they were friendly I cannot tell you. I think sometimes that the agents of the Genoese, who had hidden us there, must have been playing their own game as well as their masters'. There was, for example, a dark man who often visited the Market: he called himself a lay-brother and seemed to be busy with religious work among the poor of the quarter. We knew him as Maître Antoine at first, and so he was generally called: but he told us that his real name was Antonio—or Antonin, as he spoke it, and that he came from Italy. He took a great fancy to us and obtained leave of Maman Trebuchet to teach us the Scriptures: but what he really taught us was to speak with him in Italian. We did not know at the time that, though he called it Tuscan, he was all the while teaching us our own Corsican. Nor, I believe, did our guardian know this —but one day, finding out by chance that we knew Italian (for we had begun to talk it together, that she might not understand what we said) and discovering how we had picked it up, she flew into a dreadful rage, lay in wait next day to catch Maître Antoine as he came up the stairs, and fell upon him with such fury that the poor man fled out of the house and we never saw him again.

" After this—I believe about a year later—there

came a day when she bought a new cap and shawl for herself and new clothes for us, and, having seen that we were thoroughly washed, took us up the hill to a fine street near the palace, and to a hotel which was almost the grandest house in the street. We entered, and were led into the presence of a very noble-looking gentleman in a long yellow dressing-gown, who blessed us and gave us a kiss apiece, and some gold money, and afterwards poured out wine for Maman Trebuchet and thanked her for taking such good care of us."

"That was your father, Princess."

"I have often thought so. But remember nothing of his face except that he had tears in his eyes when we said good-bye to him; at which I wondered a great deal, for I had never seen a man crying. When we were outside again in the street Maman Trebuchet took the gold away from us. I think she too must have received money: for from that day she neglected her marketing and drank more heavily than before. About a month later she was dead.

"On the day of the funeral there came to our house a man dressed like a gentleman—yet I believe rather that he must have been some kind of courier or valet. He spoke to us very kindly, and said that we had friends, who had sent him to us; that when we grew up we should not want for money; but that

just now it was most important we should be put to school and made fit for our proper position in life. We must make up our minds to be separated, he said—and at this we both wept—but we should see one another often. For Camillo he had found lodgings with an excellent tutor, in whose care, after a year's study, he was to travel abroad and see the world: while for me he had chosen a home with some discreet ladies who would attend to my schooling.

"The house was in the Rue de Luxembourg—a corner house, where the street is joined by a lane running from the Place du Paivis. He led me to it that same evening, and Camillo came too, to make sure that I was comfortable. It was a strange house and full of ladies, the most of them young and all very handsomely dressed. But for their dresses I could almost have fancied it some kind of convent. At all events, they received me kindly, and many of them wept when they saw my parting with Camillo."

Here the Princess paused, and sat silent for so long that I bent forward in the dusk to read her face. She drew away, shivering, and put up both hands as if to cover it.

"Well, Princess?"

"That house, cavalier! . . . that horrible house! . . . Ah, remember that I was a child, scarcely

twelve years old—I had heard vile words among the market folk, but they were words and meant nothing to me: and now I saw things which I did not understand and—and I became used to them before ever guessing that these were the things those vile words had meant. The women were pretty, you see . . . and merry, and kind to me at first. Before God I never dreamed that I was looking on harm—not at first—but afterwards, when it was too late. The people who had put me there ceased to send money, and, being a strong child and willing to work, at first I was put to make the women their chocolate, and carry it up to them of a morning, and so, little by little, I came to be their house-drudge. I had lost all news of Camillo. For hours I had hunted through the streets of Brussels, if by chance I might get sight of him . . . but he was lost. And I—O cavalier, have pity on me!"

"Wife," said I, standing before her, "why have you told me this? Did I not say to you that I have seen your face and believe, and no story shall shake my belief? . . . Nay, then, I am glad—yes, glad. Dear enough, God knows, you would have been to me had I met you, a child among these hills and ignorant as a child of evil. How much dearer you, who have trodden the hot ploughshares and come to me through the fires! . . . See now, I could kneel

to you, O queen, for shame at the little I have deserved."

But she put out a hand to check me. "O friend," she said sadly, "will you never understand? For the great faith you pay me I shall go thankfully all my days: but the faith that should answer it I cannot give you. . . . Ah, there lies the cruelty! You are able to trust, and I can never trust in return. You can believe, but I cannot believe. I have seen all men so vile that the root of faith is withered in me. . . . Sir, believe, that though everything that makes me will to thank you must make me seem the more ungrateful, yet I honour you too much to give you less than an equal faith. I am your slave, if you command. But if you ask what only can honour us two as man and wife, you lose all, and I am for ever degraded."

I stepped back a pace. "O Princess," I said slowly, "I shall never claim your faith until you bring it to me humbly, with a straight brow and truth on your lips. Let this account be closed between us until you come to me—as in the end you shall—asking to reopen it. *That* was the challenge I flung to you, long ago, over my friend's grave. . . . And now, let all this rest for a while. Take up your story again and tell me the story to the end."

So in the darkness, seated there upon the mill-

stone with her gun across her knees, she told me all the story, very quietly:—How at the last she had been found in the house in Brussels by Marc'antonio and Stephanu and fetched home to the island; how she had found there her brother Camillo in charge of Fra Domenico, his tutor and confessor; with what kindness the priest had received her, how he had confessed her and assured her that the book of those horrible years was closed; and how, nevertheless, the story had crept out, poisoning the people's loyalty and her brother's chances.

I heard her to the end, or almost to the end: for while she drew near to conclude, and while I stood grinding my teeth upon the certainty that all this plot—from the kidnapping straight down to the spreading of the slanders—had been Master Domenico's work, and his only, the air thudded with a distant dull concussion at which, breaking off her narrative, she lifted her head to listen.

"It is the sound of guns," said I, listening too, while half a dozen similar concussions followed. "Heavy artillery, too, and from the southward."

"Nay; but what light is that, yonder, to the north?"

She pointed into the night behind me, and I turned to see a faint glow spreading along the northern horizon, and mounting, and reddening as it mounted until

the black hills between us and Cape Corso stood up against it in sharp outline.

"O wife," said I, "since you must be weary, sleep, if you will, for a while, and I will keep watch: but wake soon, for yonder is something worth your seeing."

"Whose work is it, think you?"

"The work," said I, "of a man who would set the whole world on fire, and only for love."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FLAME AND THE ALTAR

And when he saw the statly towre
  Shining baith clere and bricht,
Whilk stood abune the jawing wave,
  Built on a rock of height,

Says, Row the boat, my mariners,
  And bring me to the land,
For yonder I see my love's castle
  Close by the saut sea strand.—*Rough Royal.*

As 'twixt two equal armies Fate
  Suspends uncertain victory,
Our souls—which to advance our state
  Were gone out—hung 'twixt her and me:

And whilst our souls negotiate there,
  We like sepulchral statues lay;
All day the same our postures were,
  And we said nothing, all the day.
—Donne, *The Ecstasie.*

She rose from the stone willingly enough, but swayed a little, finding her feet; and the faint light, as she turned her face to it, showed me that she was weary almost to fainting. In short she had come to a pass where the more haste would certainly make the worse speed.

"It is not spirit you lack, but sleep," said I, and she confessed that it was so. An hour's rest would recover her, she said, and obediently lay down where I found a couch for her on a bank of sweet-smelling heath above the road. I too wanted rest, and settled myself down with my back against a citron-tree some twenty paces distant.

Chaucer says somewhere (and it is true), that women take less sleep and take it more lightly than men. It seemed to me that I had scarcely closed my eyes before I opened them again at a touch on my shoulder. The night was yet dark around us, save for the glow to the northward, and at first I would hardly believe when the Princess told me that I had been sleeping near upon three hours. Then it occurred to me that for a long while the sky overhead had been shaking and repeating the boom of cannon.

"There is firing to the south of us," she said; "and heavier firing than where the light is. It comes from Nonza or thereabouts."

"Then it is no affair of ours, even if we could reach it. But the flame yonder will lead us to my father and (I trust) to the Queen Emilia."

So we took the white, glimmering high-road again and stepped out briskly, refreshed by sleep and the cool night air that went with us, blowing softly across

the ridges on our right. We found a track that skirted the village of Pino, leading us wide among orchards of citron and olive, and had scarcely regained the road before the guns to the south ceased firing. Also the red glow, though it still suffused the north, began to fade as we neared it and climbed the last of steep hills that run out to the extremity of the Cape. There upon the summit suddenly we came to a stand and caught our breath.

The sea lay at our feet, and down across its black floor to the base of the cliff on which we stood ran a broad ribbon of light. It shone from a rock less than half a league distant: and on that rock stood a castle which was a furnace—its walls black as the bars of a grate, its windows aglow with contained fire. For the moment it seemed that this fire filled the whole pile of masonry: but presently, while we stood and stared, a sudden flame, shooting high from the walls, lit up the front of a tall tower above them, with a line of battlements at its base and on the battlements a range of roofs yet intact. As though a slide had been opened and as rapidly shut again, this vision of tower, roofs, battlements gleamed for a second and vanished as the flame sank and a cloud of smoke and sparks rolled up in its place and drifted heavily to leeward.

With a light touch on the Princess's arm I bade

her follow me, and we raced together down the slope. At the foot of it we plunged into a grove of olives and through it, as through a screen, emerged upon the street of a little *marina*—two dozen fisher-huts, huddled close above the foreshore, and tenantless—for their inhabitants were gathered all on the beach and staring at the blaze.

I have said that the folk at Cape Corso are a race apart: and surely there never was a stranger crowd than that in which, two minutes later, we found ourselves mingling unchallenged. They accepted us, maybe, as a minor miracle of the night. They gazed at us curiously there in the light of the conflagration, and from us away to the burning island, and talked together in whispers, in a patois of which I caught but one word in three. They asked me no questions. Their voices filled the beach with a kind of subdued murmuring, all alike gentle and patiently explanatory.

"It is the island of Giraglia," said one to me. "Yes, yes; this will be the work of the patriots—a brave feat too, there's no denying."

I pointed to a line of fishing-boats moored a short furlong off the shore in the shoal water.

"If you own one," said I, "give me leave to hire her from you, and name your price."

"*Perchè, perchè?*"

"I wish to sail her to the island."

"O *galant'uomo*, but why should any one desire to sail to the island to-night of all nights, seeing that to-night they have set it on fire?"

I stared at his simplicity. "You are not patriots, it seems, at this end of the Cape?"

He shook his head gravely. "The Genoese on the island are our customers, and buy our fish. Why should men quarrel?"

"If it come to commerce, then, will you sell me your boat? The price of her should be worth many a day's barter of fish."

He shook his head again, but turned and called his neighbours to him, men and women, and they began to discuss my offer, all muttering together, their voices mingling confusedly as in a dream.

By and by the man turned to me. "The price is thirty-five livres, signore, on deposit, for which you may choose any boat you will. We are peaceable folk and care not to meddle; but the half shall be refunded if you bring her back safe and sound."

"Fetch me a shore-boat, then," said I, while they counted my money, having fetched a lantern for the purpose.

But it appeared that shore-boat there was none. I learned later that my father and Captain Pomery, acting on his behalf, had hired all the shore-boats

at these *marinas* (of which there are three hard by the extremity of the Cape) for use in the night attack upon the island.

"Hold you my gun, then, Princess," said I, "while I swim out to the nearest": and, wading out till the dark water reached to my breast, I chose out my boat, swam to her—it was but a few strokes—clambered on board, caught up a sweep, and worked her back to the beach. The Princess, holding our two guns high, waded out to me and I lifted her on board.

We heard the voices of the villagers murmuring behind us while I hoisted the little sprit-sail and drew the sheet home. The night-breeze fluking among the gullies, filled the sail at once, fell light again and left it flapping, then drew a steady breath aft, and the voices were lost in the hiss of water under the boat's stern.

But not until we had passed the extreme point of land did we find the true breeze, which there headed us lightly, blowing (as nearly as I can guess) from N.N.E., yet allowed us a fair course, so that by hauling the sheet close I could point well to windward of the fiery reflection on the water and fetch the island on a single tack. It was here, as we ran out of the loom of the land, that the waning moon lifted her rim over the hills astern; and it was here,

as we cleared the point, that her rays, traversing the misty sea between us and Elba, touched the grey-white canvas of a vessel jeeling along (as we say at the fishing in Cornwall) and holding herself to windward for a straight run down upon the island—a vessel which at first glance I recognised for the *Gauntlet*.

Plainly she was standing by awaiting; plainly then her crew—or those of them engaged for the assault—were detained yet upon the island; whence (to make matters surer), there sounded, as our boat ran up to it, a few loose dropping shots and a single cry—a cry that travelled across to us down the lane of light directing us to the quay. The blaze had died down; the upper keep, now overhanging us, stood black and unlit against a sky almost as black; but on a stairway at the base of it torches were moving and the flame of them shone on the slippery steps of a quay to which I guided the boat and, jamming the helm down with a thrust of the foot, ran forward and lowered sail.

We carried more way than I had reckoned for, and—the Princess having no science to help me—crashed in among a press of boats huddled in the black shadow alongside the quay-steps, and with such force as almost to stave in the upper timbers of a couple and sink them where they lay. No voice chal-

lenged us. I wondered at this as I gripped at the dark, dew-drenched canvas to haul it inboard, and while I wondered, a strong light shone down upon us from the quay's edge.

A man stood there, holding a torch high over his head and shading his eyes as he peered down at the boat—a tall man in a Trappist habit girt high on his naked legs almost to the knees.

"My father?" I demanded. "Where is my father?"

He made no answer, but signed to us to make our landing, and waited for us, still holding the torch high while I helped the Princess from one boat to another and so to the slippery steps.

"My father?" I demanded again.

He turned and led us along the quay to a stairway cut in the living rock. At the foot of it he lowered his torch for a moment that we might see and step aside. Two bodies lay there—two of his brethren, stretched side by side and disposedly, with arms crossed on their breasts, ready for burial. High on the stairway, where it entered the base of a battlemented wall under an arch of heavy stonework, a solitary monk was drawing water from a well and sluicing down the steps. The water ran past our feet, and in the dawn now paling about us I saw its colour. . . .

The burnt building—it had been the Genoese barracks—stood high on the right of the stairway. Its roof had fallen in upon the flames raging through its wooden floors, so that what had been but an hour ago a blazing furnace was now a cold shell of masonry out of which a cloud of smoke rolled lazily and hung about the upper walls of the fortress. Through its window-spaces, void and fire-smirched, as now and again the reek lifted I saw the pale upper sky with half a dozen charred ends of roof-timber sharply defined against it—a black and broken grid; and while yet I stared upward another pair of monks crossed the platform above the archway. They carried a body between them—the body of a man in the Genoese uniform—and were bearing it towards a bastion on the western side, that overhung the sea. There the battlements hid them from me; but by and by I heard a splash. . . .

By this time we were mounting the stairway. We passed under the arch—where a door shattered and wrenched from its upper hinge lay askew against the wall—and climbed to the platform. From this another flight of steps (but these were of worked granite) led straight as a ladder to a smaller platform at the foot of the keep; and high upon these stood my uncle Gervase directing half a score of monks to right an overturned cannon.

His back was towards me, but he turned as I hailed him by name—turned and I saw that he carried his arm in a sling. He came down the steps to welcome me, but slowly and with a very grave face.

"My father—where is he?"

"He is alive, lad." My uncle took my hand and pressed it. "That is to say, I left him alive. But come and see. . . ." He paused—my uncle was ever shy in the presence of women—and with his sound hand lifted his hat to the Princess. "The signorina, if she will forgive a stranger for suggesting it—she may be spared some pain if——"

"She seeks her mother, sir," said I, cutting him short; "and her mother is the Queen Emilia."

"Your servant, signorina." My uncle bowed again and with a reassuring smile. "And I am happy to tell you that, so far at least, our expedition has succeeded. Your mother lives, signorina—or, should I say, Princess? Yes, yes, Princess to be sure— But come, the both of you, and be prepared for gladness or sorrow, as may betide."

He ran up the steps and we followed him, across the platform to a low doorway in the base of the keep, through this, and up a winding staircase of spirals, so steep and so many that the head swam. Open lancet-windows—one at each complete round of the stair—admitted the morning breeze, and

through them, as I clung to the newel and climbed dizzily, I had glimpses of the sea twinkling far below. I counted these windows up to two dozen, but had lost my reckoning for minutes before we emerged, at my uncle's heels, upon a semicircular landing and in face of an iron-studded door the hasp of which he rattled gently. A voice answered from within bidding him open, and very softly he thrust the door wide.

The room into which we looked was of fair size and in shape semicircular to match the landing without. Two windows lit it, and between us and the nearest knelt Dom Basilio busy with a web of linen which he was tearing into bandages. His was the voice that had commanded us to enter; and, passing in, I was aware that the room had two other occupants; for behind the door stood a truckle-bed, and along the bed lay my father, pale as death, and swathed in bandages, and by the foot of the bed on a stool, with a spinning-wheel beside her, sat a woman.

It needed no second look to tell me her name. Mean cell as it was that held her, and mean her seat, the worn face could belong to no one meaner than a Queen. A spool of thread had rolled from her hand, across the floor; yet her hands upon her lap were shaped as though they held it yet. As she

sat now, rigid, with her eyes on the bed, she must have been sitting for minutes. So, while Dom Basilio snipped and rent at his bandages she gazed at my father on the bed, and my father gazed back into her eyes, drinking the love in them, and the faces of both seemed to shine with a solemn awe.

I think we must have been standing, we three, on the threshold there for close upon a minute before my father turned his eyes towards me—so far beyond this life was he travelling and so far had the sound of our entrance to follow and overtake his dying senses.

"Prosper! . . ."

"My father!"

He lifted a hand weakly towards the bandages wrapping his breast. "These—these are of her spinning, lad. This is her bed they have laid me in. . . . Who is it stands there behind your shoulder?"

"It is the Princess, father— You remember the Princess Camilla? Yes, madam"—I turned to the Queen—"it is your daughter I bring—your daughter and, with your blessing, my wife."

The Queen, though her daughter knelt, did not offer to embrace her, but lifted two feeble hands over the bowed head as though to bless, while over her hands her gaze still rested on my father.

"We have had brave work, lad," he panted. "I

am sorry you come late for it—but you were bound on your own business, eh?" He turned with a ghost of his old smile. "Nay, child, and you did right; I am not blaming you—the young to the young, and let the dead bury the dead. Kiss me, lad, if you can find room between these plaguy bandages. Your pardon, Dom Basilio: you have done your best and, if I seem ungrateful, let me make amends and thank you for giving me this last, best hour. . . . Indeed, Dom Basilio, I am a dead man, but your bandages are tying my soul here for a while, where it would stay. Gervase—" he reached out a hand to my uncle, who was past hiding his tears, "Gervase—brother—there needs no talk, no thanks, between you and me. . . ."

I drew back and, touching Dom Basilio by the shoulder, led him to the window. "He has no single wound that in itself would be fatal," the Trappist whispered; "but a twenty that together have bled him to death. He hacked his way up this stair through half a score of Genoese; at the door here, there was none left to hinder him and we, having found and followed with the keys, climbed over bodies to find him stretched before it——"

"Emilia!" It was my father's voice lifted in triumph; and the Queen rose at the sound of it, trembling, and stood by the bed. "Emilia! Ah,

love—ah, Queen, bend lower!—the love we loved—there, over the Taravo—it was not lost. . . . It meets in our children—and we—and we——"

The Queen bent.

"O great one—O soul of my soul—and we in Heaven!"

I lifted the Princess and led her to the window fronting the dawn. We looked not towards the pillow where their lips met; but into the dawn, and from the dawn into each other's eyes.

THE END

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